

# A Land Fit for Heroes?

Gairloch & area 1919 onwards –  
life after the Great War

The armistice was signed on November 11<sup>th</sup> 1918 at 11am and the Peace Treaty was signed in Paris on July 1<sup>st</sup> 1919. Locally the Aultbea Naval Base was closed in April 1919. Most servicemen didn't return until 1919 and how they must have felt after their long train journeys from the south of England to Achnasheen and then their subsequent last legs of their journeys to their homes is difficult to imagine.

The Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, promised the returning servicemen and women that they would return to a land 'fit for heroes'.

Members of both Gairloch Museum and the U3A Local History group researched the possible reality of life after the war in the Gairloch area and subsequently mounted an exhibition. One returning soldier, Alexander Mackenzie of Poolewe, was taken to illustrate possible choices and probable outcomes. This booklet takes information from the exhibition and a booklet compiled about the Mackenzie family. Posters go into storage but a booklet will last for ever.

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The parish of Gairloch is situated in the north-west Highlands of Scotland, about seventy miles north of Inverness. It is a remote area with its long, undulating coastline, its towering mountains, its moorlands, its rivers and its sealochs. After World War 1 the roads were single-track and poorly surfaced. Its nearest railway station was, and still is, at Achnasheen, about thirty miles away. It was a widespread parish with several small villages and townships which catered for inhabitants' needs.

People from the area were very patriotic and men, young and old, heeded the call to arms. Records show that around 525 local men found themselves in the army or the navy. There were others who joined foreign regiments because they had emigrated before the hostilities began. A few women joined as nurses.

By the end of the war about 90 men from the immediate area had been killed as well as those from abroad. There were few villages and townships which were spared.

For these there were only their families' memories, a name on a gravestone or a memorial, an inscription on a wall.

***We will remember them.***

So what about the returning 435? Married or single they had to cope with a life which was very different to the intensity and hardship of the war years. Would they be able to be crofters? Might they have fished for a living? What other jobs were there?

Would there be enough to keep them in this Gairloch parish or would they move? And if they did would this be to industrial cities and towns or to lands far away? The exhibition tried to answer these questions.

For details of all those who served in the war from the area the booklet *The Heroes of Gairloch Parish World War 1* by Ann Roots and William MacRobbie is excellent.

## I WAS YOUNG

I was young when I went to war...  
Young and bold and strong  
But what I saw, it made me old  
My time seemed very long  
'Twas the War that made me old  
Felt woe beyond my years  
It was the War that tore my heart  
With death of all my peers  
'Til, like an old man, I was left  
To cope alone, no friends  
To grow, to fight, to carry on  
While their youth never ends.

S J Robinson

## Alexander Mackenzie



Alexander, from Poolewe, enlisted on 7<sup>th</sup> November 1914 when he was 22 years old. He was a lance corporal (1064) in the 4<sup>th</sup> (Ross Highland) Battalion of the Seaforth Highlanders. This was a unit of the Territorial Force and when war broke out in August 1914 the men were recalled from their annual camp and mobilised for war.

Alexander's brother, John, also enlisted at the same time. He was a private (1246).

This photograph is of D Company, Poolewe, and features both brothers. Which is John is not known as there were three John Mackenzies in the Company).



## A Local Hero!



By the end of the war Alexander had been promoted to a Company Sergeant Major (200022). In addition to the Victory Medal, the British Medal and the 1914 Star he was awarded the D.C.M. (the Distinguished Conduct Medal) on 30<sup>th</sup> October 1918.

*During an attack, when all the platoon officers had become casualties, this Warrant Officer reorganised elements of the company and overpowered detached posts of the enemy. His conspicuous and tireless energy enabled the company to gain ascendancy over the enemy at a critical time, and he set throughout a splendid example to all.*

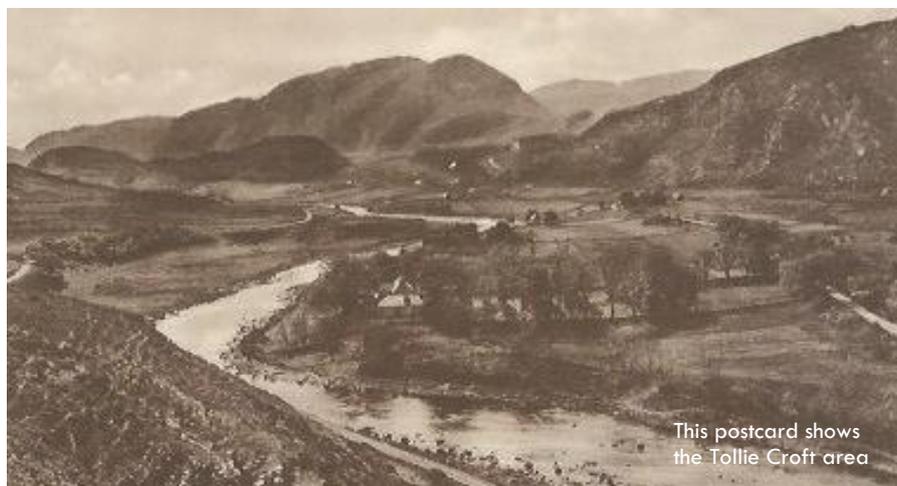


## So what do we know about Alexander?

Before the war Alexander was an assistant inspector of the poor and was living in 12 Tollie Croft, Poolewe with his father, Donald, a farm griever, his mother, Jane, his brothers John and Murdo and his sisters Margaret and Murdina. Father Donald worked for the Inverewe Estate which at that time was owned and managed by Robert Hanbury who was the husband of Mairi, Osgood Mackenzie's daughter.

Croft 12 was probably a family croft with another Donald Mackenzie being allocated the tenancy when the crofting townships were made in 1845.

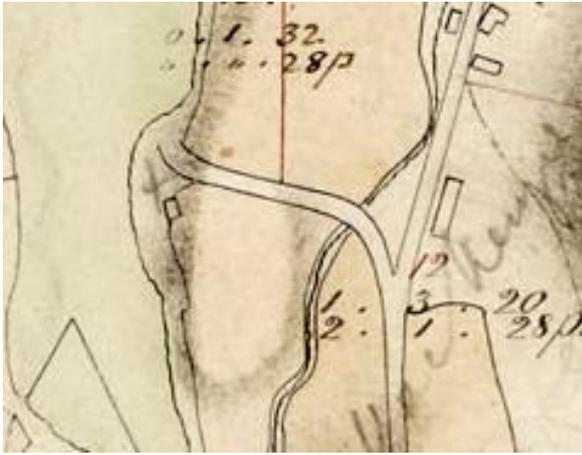
On the 1841 census this Donald had two sons, Donald and Murdo. Donald, the elder son, later took over croft 12. But he never married. And Murdo cannot be traced. After 1851 he seems to have left the area.



This postcard shows the Tollie Croft area

However, by the 1891 census Alexander's father, Donald, is found in Poolewe as a farm servant, and by 1901 he seems to have moved into a second house on croft 12. (He had lived in the Lochbroom area where his first child, Henrietta, was born).

What was his relationship within this Mackenzie family? Was he, perhaps, Murdo's son?



This section of the Poolewe crofting map shows Croft 12 on both sides of the road with one boundary being the River Ewe



The house on croft 12 today to which Alexander returned after the war. Its exterior has hardly changed over the years.

**But we have to ask, what was life really like for Alexander? What were his choices?**

### **Employment opportunities – crofting & farming**



When the crofting townships were made in 1845 families were allocated parcels of land, from two to five acres, upon which they built their house, a barn and maybe a byre. They marked out their boundaries by establishing drystone walls and drained their land by digging out field drains. Their water came from wells protected by a capstone and their waste went into middens. They had an allocation of sheep and cattle which grazed on common grazing areas outwith the head-dyke, the main township wall, and they could keep hens. On their arable land which they had cleared of stones they grew potatoes and other root crops and the barley grown would go to the local mill for flour. It was a simple but hard life. There were few roads although the crofts were divided by passageways and transport was by foot or small boat.

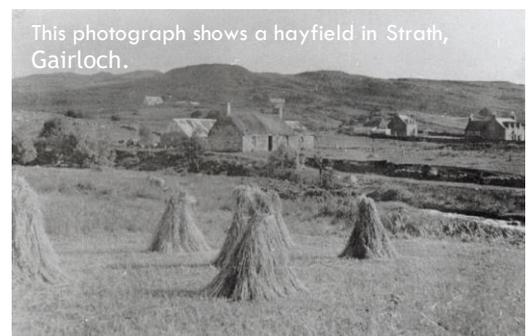


**So what changed for Alexander and his fellow servicemen when they returned from the war?  
IN FACT VERY LITTLE.**

These crofts could support a family (father, mother, several children and maybe a grandparent). Sometimes a second house was built to accommodate the eldest son and his wife and family.

### **What about the other sons or those from families without a croft?**

Sometimes they would find other work but often, and especially when they married, they had to move away. If the returning servicemen already had a croft then they carried on small-scale farming as they had done before 1914. But if there was no room for them then they had to find other work and move.



This photograph shows a hayfield in Strath, Gairloch.

What about the larger, more commercial farms? Did these need agricultural labourers? And if so were the ex-servicemen qualified to take on these jobs?

There were farms at:

- Kinlochewe (several) & Slattadale
- Red Point, Badachro & Shildaig
- Kerrisdale, Flowerdale & Achtercairn
- Sand
- Tollie, Poolewe, Inveran & Tournaig
- Kernsary & Letterewe
- Drumachork, Aultbea (Aird) & Isle Ewe
- Udrigle, Laide (Sand) & Coast



Most of these were sheep farms although some cows were kept, especially where there were hotels which needed milk – such as Aultbea and Kinlochewe. Few horses were kept and it is said that farmers and crofters lent their horses to others.

Although it appears that there are several farms, the 1911 census tells us that there were few job opportunities. Apart from the farmers there were ploughmen, shepherds or sheep managers, cowherds and cattlemen plus farm servants (labourers or workers). Often shepherds and sheep managers came from outwith the area and were thought of as specialised jobs.



There were horse shortages post-war. In April 1919 Farquhar MacRae, a shoe-maker and crofter from 1 Melvaig, asked Dugald Campbell at Rhu Ré lighthouse if he could borrow his pony for three days to make up a pair for ploughing his croft. This was because of the scarcity of horses in the area so that springwork was delayed. The request was turned down because the neighbouring crofters might also ask and this would be beyond the pony's capacity.

Alexander's father, Donald, was a farm grieve. Therefore, he was an overseer and as such had a position of responsibility. Perhaps he could help Alexander find a job.

Alexander as the eldest son would have had a better chance than his brothers, John and Murdo, of becoming a crofter. But many of his returning fellow-soldiers would find it difficult to get into farming and would have to look elsewhere.

### **Employment opportunities – fishing**

Before the war fishing was a major industry in Scotland with over 32,500 men employed. By 1917 there were fewer than 22,000. What might have been the impact on the parish of Gairloch? We know, from the 1911 census returns, that there were 255 fishermen with some men combining this with crofting. So would this number have decreased to less than 200 after the war? And would this have caused major income problems for large families?

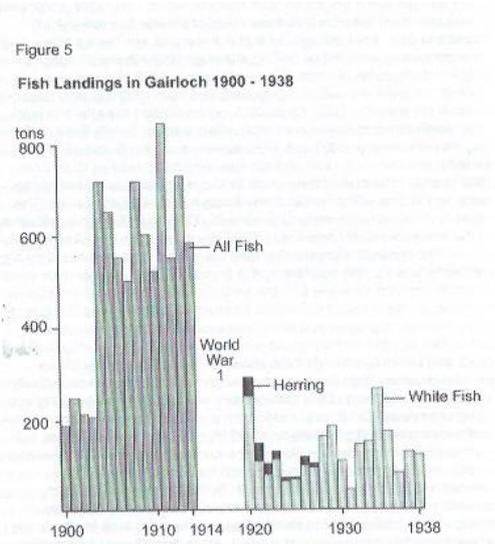
White fish such as cod was even rationed in 1917 and during the war years the North Sea was almost totally closed to fishing. Fishing was only allowed in inshore areas on the West coast.

Herring fishing was at its peak before the war with these fish landed and cured in places on Loch Ewe and in the Badachro area. After the war there were far fewer men employed in the fishing industry and by 1921 there were only 119 fishermen and 61 boats. Cod was also caught but as the years went by larger boats were used. Because of the railways (Achnasheen was the area's nearest station) fish could be sent fresh to consumers so the market for cured fish declined. The prices offered were poor and men found other employment.

This chart, taken from *The Story of Fishing in Gairloch* by James Coull, shows how fish landings decreased dramatically in the years after the war.

**So could Alexander and all the other returners from war have found any livelihood from the fishing industry?**

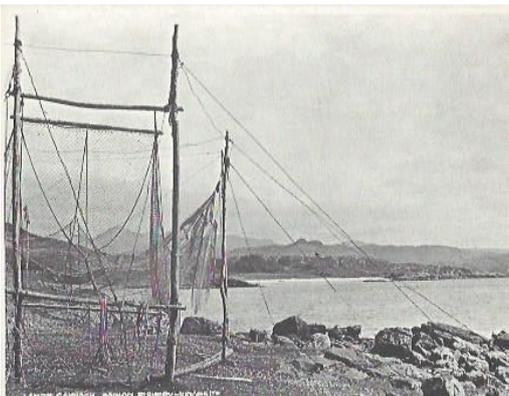
The Badachro area was once very important where fishing was concerned. The bay was sheltered and men from the east coast were brought over to teach the local men how to fish. There were salt stores and places where coopers made the barrels. There were 3 fishing stations. One was at Aird, opposite Badachro. The building can still be seen, although now it is a private house. A second was on Isle Horrisdale where fish curing took place. The third was built around 1840 and is on what we know as Dry Island. This closed after the others but by the end of WW1 it was no longer used.



In Gairloch, Charleston House was also a fishing station and is now owned privately. It was built by a fish merchant in 1776, Charles Cumming, from Aberdeen and is similar to Aird House. But by the time the servicemen return home these fishing stations have closed.



Fishing boats, such as this example *The Mhaighdean Mara*, were used. This was abandoned after 1950.



Salmon fishing nets at Gairloch and the pier at Gairloch Harbour.

And what of the Poolewe area? In the 1800s Poolewe was important for salmon fishing but by the time our servicemen returned this was no longer a major industry. There would have been private salmon fishing on the River Ewe and men would have been employed as ghillies. The only fishing that would have taken place was probably local fishermen augmenting their family's food.

After the war the only commercial fishing business would have been in Gairloch. The heyday for fishing was obviously in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After the war with the fishing stations closed the only possibility seems to have been employment at Gairloch or buying a boat with some other men and fishing to sell locally. There were also coastal salmon fishing stations in places such as Red Point, Achtercairn and Poolewe. Some continued after the war and might have provided employment.

So, as fishing suffered a serious decline after the war it is unlikely that Alexander could find a job on the boats.

**Look again Alexander.**

### **Employment opportunities – what else?**

Once again the 1911 census gives us information about the types of jobs that were available in the area before the war. Doubtless these would still be needed when war ended but would there have been vacancies?

**When Alexander returned where would he buy goods?  
What shops were there? What about money?**

Families need to eat. What they cannot produce on the croft or fish from the sea they must buy. There was at least one shop in all the small townships as well as the larger villages. These sold groceries and sometimes other goods as well. But it appeared from the census that most shops were family-run where goods were sold in the front room and others weren't employed. There were a few specialist shops such as butchers, bakers and an ironmonger.



*This 1901 postcard show Poolewe main street. In the 1911 census there were three shops in the village: a grocer, a general merchant and a baker. This was Alexander's village.*

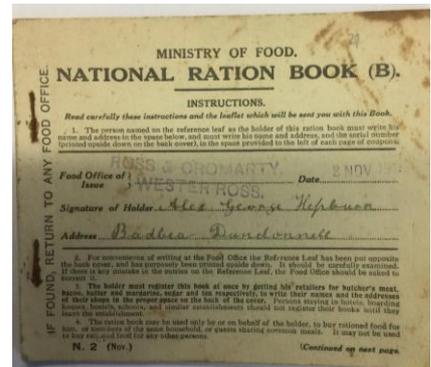
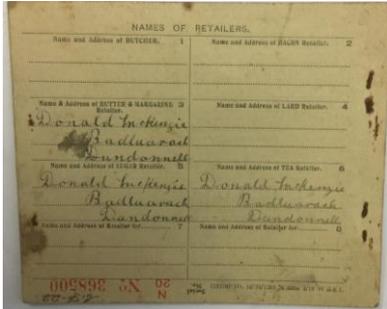


Shop built in 1902 in Strath, Gairloch

Everybody needed clothes. Women would spin wool, weave and knit and they would sew and mend. On the 1911 census there were at least 14 male tailors. There were also about 5 shoe and bootmakers. But these would be specialised jobs and men were apprenticed first before they were qualified to make clothes.

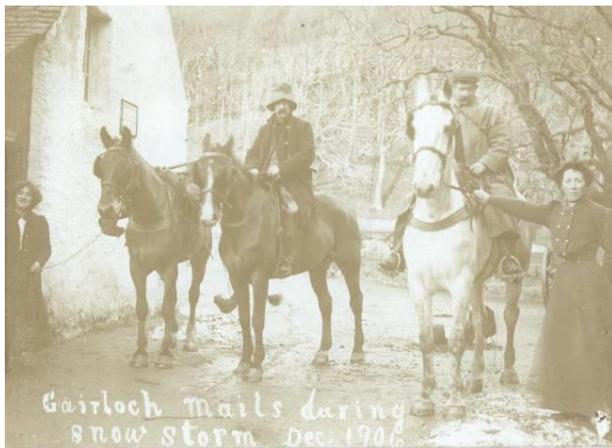
During the war there was rationing and this continued for several years after the war. Households had to register with local shops to buy:

- lard, butter, margarine
- sugar, tea
- bacon
- butchered meats.



The first 'ordinary' pensions were introduced in January 1909. Dependents of deceased servicemen were given benefits as were some returning servicemen because of disabilities.

Banks and Post Offices were therefore necessary. The only bank was to be found in Gairloch. Bank House, next to today's bank, was built in 1867 to accommodate the bank and the bank manager and his family. But how many 'ordinary' people would have used this?



*This photograph was taken outside the Post Office at Inchgowan, Gairloch. Although it shows the mail in 1906, there wouldn't have been much difference after the war.*

There were several local Post Offices. Main ones dealt with telegraph and money orders while sub-post offices made no money transactions. By 1921 there were Post Offices in Gairloch, Strath, Badachro, Opinan, North Erradale, Kinlochewe, Aultbea, Loch Maree, Diabaig, Melvaig and Poolewe. Therefore post-masters, clerks and sub-postmasters were employed. And there were around 11 rural postmen although some were only part-time. There was also a mail coach driver. But would there have been vacancies for returning servicemen?

Telegraph systems might have come late to the area but by 1921 there was a cable hut at Lochewe (Poolewe) and telegraph wires throughout the parish

which were under the jurisdiction of the Postmaster General.

### What about manual work?

Houses, barns, byres and walls were needed. Pre-war there were around twelve stone masons. There were also six joiners, three house carpenters and a house builder. Around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century houses started to change in design and appearance. The small two-room early croft houses with little attic space were still lived in but crofting houses with an upstairs began to be built. Alexander came back to such a house.



Before the war the largest number of jobs can be found in this category. There were perhaps 63 general labourers at that time. Many of these would be working on the roads as road contractors, surveyors, quarrymen, stonebreakers and road surfacers. Roads such as this at Gruinard hill had to be surfaced and re-aligned.

As a former inspector of the poor would this kind of work suited Alexander?

### **So what about working within the tourism industry or for the 'gentry'?**

Large houses such as Flowerdale, Kinlochewe Lodge, Tournaig, Shieldaig, Letterewe and employed ghillies, gamekeepers, deer stalkers, gardeners and foresters. Alexander's father was employed on the Inverewe Estate. Could he get his son similar work?

*Here is Flowerdale House in Gairloch, the seat of the Mackenzie lairds, with its terraced lawns photographed sometime after the war.*



We learn that after the war normal estate life resumed for the wealthy. From the winter of 1918 to about 1921 Osgood Mackenzie's stalker, Donald Urquhart, killed 25 foxes. On one day he killed two eagles and two foxes and for two seasons running he got ten eagles. On another occasion he shot a wildcat in a trap, got a hind and an otter. And all this after such recent human slaughter!



Tourism began before the war which led to the importance of the hotels. There were five of these: Kinlochewe, Talladale (Loch Maree Hotel), Gairloch, Poolewe and Aultbea. Jobs were for porters, gardeners, hotel boots, waiters, barmen and gardeners. This was the time when motorised vehicles started to take the place of horse-drawn transport so there were both coachmen and chauffeurs. (Blacksmiths were still needed as were carters and vanmen in the wider area.)

*The picture of Gairloch Hotel with early cars is undated this but may have been taken in the 1920s. Motorised transport made a lot of difference to the area.*

Alexander was a clerk before the war. Could he have returned to this post? Would his fellow servicemen be able to return to their former work?

## So what was life like in the various villages and townships?

Each community was self-sufficient and although the smaller townships had a shop it was in the larger villages where there were more facilities.

Before the days of motorised vehicles horses and carts were widely used. Therefore, it was important that each area had a blacksmith, to shoe horses, repair cart wheels and do general metalwork. Today we can still find houses which still retain the name 'smiddy'. Blacksmiths learnt their trade as apprentices, often from their fathers. We can find information from the 1911 census and the 1919 Valuation Rolls.

*This is the former smiddy, Riverside, Poolewe.*



The blacksmith at the Gairloch Harbour area was David Mackenzie whilst Hector MacIntosh was the blacksmith and ironmonger in Strath. He employed Donald Campbell who was a journeyman blacksmith from Aultbea. This horse is being shod in Strath.

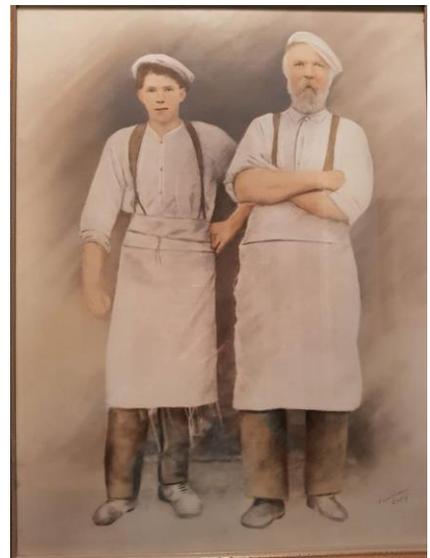
Roderick Mackenzie and his son, John, were blacksmiths in Laide and Louis Mackenzie was a blacksmith in Obinen. Although there was a smiddy in Aultbea there is no record

of a blacksmith. There was a smithy in Badachro.

In Poolewe at Riverside John MacLean was the blacksmith and his sons, Roderick and Kenneth, were his apprentices. Kenneth was a private in the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. Seaforth Highlanders and was discharged in May 1916. He was awarded the Victory & British medals and the 1914 star. The photograph, of John and Kenneth, was taken c1910. Roderick later inherited the house and business. What happened to Kenneth? He would have known Alexander.

Alexander MacIver was the blacksmith in Kinlochewe and he employed Coll MacGregor from Lochcarron. Cars were in their infancy but there was a motor hirer in Gairloch, Colin Gunn.

Other trades, often home-based, included carpentry, stone masonry, shoe and boot making, weaving and tailoring. Some of these trades were found throughout the parish. Slater's Directory of 1921 is a helpful reference book. As an example there was a carpenter in Aultbea, Hugh Cameron, and there was a joiner, Alexander Mackenzie, in Strath. Shoe and boot makers were found in Portnaheile, Strath and Kinlochewe. Kenneth Mackenzie was a weaver in Mellon Charles. There were several tailors registered – in Badachro, two in Strath (one being a clothier as well) and Kinlochewe. And there were more so no-one had to travel far to get work done.



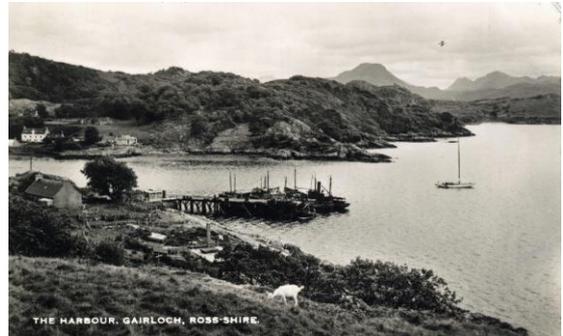


Like motorised transport photography was also in its infancy and it is interesting to find that John Campbell had a photography 'studio' at Achadesdale. Did he sell cameras, take photographs or have these made into postcards?

*The small photography shop near the Free Church in Gairloch.*

Anything which could not be grown in the fields or reared on the land would have to be brought in by sea as this was the preferred method of transporting goods because in general the roads were very poor.

The Laide area, Aultbea, Poolewe, Gairloch and Badachro had slipways or harbours for boats. Only Kinlochewe, the inland part of the parish, would have found the transport of goods more problematical.



One staple food was bread which most people baked at home. But after the war years there was a bakery in Charleston and this can still be seen. From the Gairloch Harbour area look across at Charleston House, a rather grand building. In front of this is a small bungalow-type building. Once this was the bakery and in 1921 it was run by the Gunn brothers. To make bread flour was needed and there were two mills. One was at Strath and the other at Boor. (In early days there were many more mills as well as corn drying kilns

in the townships).

Law and order was also important. There were custom and excise officers, preventive men and police constables in both Gairloch and Aultbea. The police house in Achtercairn, still lived in as a private house, was built in 1875.

And what about relaxation? We know that there were halls for communal gatherings however most ceildidhs, gatherings with some music and dancing, took place in private houses.



Gairloch Golf Club was formed in 1898 with eleven members but this was a 'rich' man's activity.

Gairloch Horticultural Society was in operation but was this open to all? And would Alexander and his fellow servicemen have felt like having fun?

## What village services were there?

When Alexander returned he later married as did others. Some men were already married and they all had responsibilities to their wives and children.

There were schools in the four villages of Kinlochewe, Gairloch (Achtercairn), Poolewe and Aultbea (Bualnaluib) plus Opinan, Badachro, Sand (Gairloch), Melvaig, Inverasdale, Laide and Mellon Udrigle. Side schools, small schools in remote areas which were attached to a main school, were found on Isle Horrisdale (this closed in 1920), Gruinard and Isle Ewe.

Feb. 26<sup>th</sup>. The following telegraph was received this morning from Clerk to Sch. Bnd.  
"Close your school today for indefinite period to prevent spread of Influenza. - Clerk.  
In accordance with above instructions school was closed today.

When Alexander married Alice they had four children, Donald, Jean, Susan and William but William died when he was six years old. Presumably the children would have gone to Poolewe school which was then situated opposite their croft where it is today. In 1919 when there was a countrywide influenza epidemic Poolewe school was closed for seven weeks from the end of February, as the school logbook recorded.

Poolewe school in the foreground.

There were two 'fever hospital tents' in the parish – one at Kerry Bay and the other at Poolewe. Would these have been for the epidemics of measles and influenza?



The doctor for the parish was Dr. William Knox who lived in Cairn Cottage, Achtercairn, Gairloch, which was built by 1900. He had an assistant in charge of Poolewe and Aultbea. To visit his patients he was driven by his driver 'Teddy'. There were other doctors at different times but one interesting one was Dr. Elsie Scobie (Scorgie) who, between 1922 and 1923, was the first female doctor in the area.

In Poolewe Street next to the Telford Church is a building which used to be the nurses' home. A plaque reads: *This nurses' home was erected in memory of Mary Lady Mackenzie of Gairloch with money left for that purpose by Dr. Charles Robertson late of Achtercairn, Gairloch 1912.'*



Nurses usually worked from home. Jessie Stewart was a certificated midwife in the Poolewe area c1917 and Annie MacAulay was another nurse in the 1920s. Often untrained women were called in for confinements such as Mrs Kenina Mackenzie of 4 Strath, Gairloch. At a later date the nurses were appointed and governed by the local Nursing Association prior to the N.H.S. They worked very closely with the doctor and often stayed with the mother before and after the birth. The fee, paid to the Nursing Association, was 10/- for a week and 7/6 for three days. Infant mortality at the time was high.

## So was it a 'land fit for heroes'?

After the war did the inhabitants of the parish of Gairloch receive anything which would make their lives easier?

In many areas in Scotland roads were of immense importance and in 1917 road roller drivers and road surveyors were exempt from the war. In 1918, from the £400 allocated by the treasurer from Wester Ross Council, the Melvaig road was given £60. Was this adequate?



The only real benefit from road improvement was the upgrading of the Achnasheen to Aultbea road. A scheme for strengthening and improving the surface of the whole 40 miles of road took place although it was felt that the volume of traffic would be too much to maintain the road in anything like a satisfactory state of repair. Whether more funds were allocated is not known.

The only housing scheme was on Isle Ewe. At the end of the war the farm was split up into twelve crofts, apparently under the scheme to create crofts for returning servicemen. Most of the crofts were taken up by the former residents and farmworkers at the time. It seems that the majority of the younger men who had been away to war chose not to return. Was this a scheme which did not work?

Today here are few very old crofters' houses still standing but there are certainly many which were built around 1900 onwards.



A government circular No.2. 1918 – *Provision of House for Working Class*. Murdo Mackenzie in South Erradale applied but no grant was given. He was advised to apply for a crofting grant. Why we may ask?

Alexander was able to return to the family croft in Poolewe but what about his fellow servicemen?

He returns to the 'normal' life which he had experienced before the war. He works. He shops. His children go to school. Doctors may be needed. Nothing changes!

### Or does it?

At the end of World War 1 returning servicemen and women should have looked forward to settling back into their old lives. They had been promised a land 'fit for heroes' by the then Prime Minister, David Lloyd George. However, the reality was somewhat different:

- employment opportunities were scarce
- money must have been a constant worry
- rationing was introduced in 1918 for some foodstuffs
- there was illness
- work in the cities beckoned
- there was the lure of greater opportunities abroad

**What would Alexander and his fellow servicemen do?**

## **Employment opportunities in the cities**

Highlanders had often moved to cities such as Glasgow to find employment. But there was a massive decline in heavy industry following the end of World War 1 with the completion of war contracts, for example:

- Ship building fell by 90% during the 1920s
- The number of iron furnaces halved by 1927 due to overseas competition
- The coal industry employed a third fewer people in the 1920s than before the war

Unemployment in Glasgow, coupled with disputes over the length of the working week led to 'The Battle of George Square' on 31<sup>st</sup> January 1919. Some 60000 strikers and protestors clashed with City of Glasgow Police, resulting in many injuries on both sides.

It is not known how many men in the Gairloch area decided to move south in the post-war years. Newspapers would give bleak information and therefore for the highlanders there was little prospect of finding employment in the industrial heartland of central Scotland after their return from the war.

This made emigration abroad more attractive to those seeking employment opportunities.

## **The lure of a new life in a new land**

Alexander's two brothers both emigrate four years after the end of the war. Would Alexander think of following them? Or would he try to persuade them to stay? Emigration to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and other parts of the Commonwealth was not a new thing, but would have seemed an attractive proposition, given the parlous state of the economy in Great Britain.

People from the Highlands had emigrated from the 1800s when times at home were bad. Whole families left their homes and started life in what must have been strange and even frightening circumstances. They often called the places in which they settled with familiar names, names that reminded them of their past lives. Look at websites and you'll find Scottish placenames – Inverness, Perth and Ross. Gairloch, sometimes written as Gairlock, is featured. Did the post-war emigrants try to live somewhere that sounded familiar?

There were 'pull' and 'push' factors to encourage those wishing to start a new life abroad. How would these affect those in the Gairloch area?

### *Push factors*

- Unemployment in Scotland was high – the fishing and agriculture industries were in crisis and there was massive decline in heavy industry, such as coal mining, iron and steel works and shipbuilding. (However, we have seen that finding work was difficult even in the rural Highlands.)
- Legislation was passed, enabling the government to forcibly purchase farm land and rent it out, but the process was very slow. Failure of the government to force big landowners to give over under-used land led to land seizures in some cases. This caused disillusionment at home and we have seen that the attempt to release farmland on Isle Ewe to enable crofts to be formed was not a success.
- In the cities there was slum housing, a poor diet and a lower standard of living than that expected by returning heroes.
- Because the British Empire was in a fragile state after the war emigration was seen as a way to shore up and strengthen the Dominions. The British government encouraged emigration firstly through the 1919 Overseas Settlement Act permitting free passage for ex-service men and women and dependents to Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and other parts of the Empire. The 1919 Overseas Settlement Act was superseded by the 1922 Empire Settlement Act, which then included 'suitable persons' from the general public. So called suitable persons were agriculturalists, farm labourers, domestics and juveniles.

We will discover that life in a new land was made attractive for the unemployed or who had few prospects of making their lives better.

#### *Pull Factors*

- The governments of Canada, Australia and New Zealand actively encouraged settlement from Britain to open up these countries. Canada had emigration agents in Glasgow, Aberdeen and Inverness and a Canadian emigration agent toured the Hebrides in 1924 on a recruitment drive.

The Inverness office opened in 1923. There were problems as the Inverness area was not a farming area but a pasturage for sheep and cattle. The agents had little knowledge of farming in Canada although it was said that crofters should do well in Cape Breton and Nova Scotia. Only 446 recruits were recorded.

(Details from *Emigration from Scotland Between the Wars. Opportunity or Exile* by Marjory Harper).

### **Where to?**

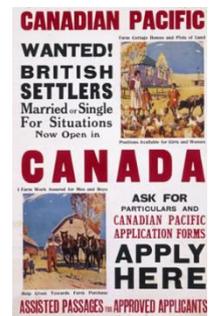
#### *America*

The records indicate that more soldiers from the Gairloch area emigrated post-war rather than before.

#### *Canada*

Looking at records of the soldiers from the Gairloch area who fought in the war, it is estimated that 19 emigrated to Canada before the war and 13 after the war and we have to assume that this also meant that relatives would emigrate with them thus swelling the numbers of those who left Scotland during this period.

In April 1923 two Canadian Pacific liners, the SS Marloch and the SS Metagama took 600 Scottish emigrants to Canada. Many took advantage of the 1922 Empire Settlement Act in order to receive subsidised passage.



#### *South Africa*

Before the war there had been a few men emigrating from the Gairloch area who later served in the war in South African companies.

#### *Australia*

Before the war it is estimated that eight soldiers from the Gairloch area had emigrated here before they had joined up, more were to follow after the war.

#### *New Zealand*

There were about nine soldiers from the Gairloch area who emigrated before the war and a further two followed after the war encouraging relatives to join them.

Between 1921 and 1930 about 550,000 Scots emigrated which equates to one-fifth of the working population. Between the two wars, Scotland had the highest emigration rate of all the European countries and 60% of emigrants in the 1930s were Scottish. The peak of this was in 1923 when nearly 30,000 people left. Many Scots viewed emigration as their escape from unemployment and poverty in the Highlands.

This resulted in a 'brain drain' as skilled and educated Scots left Scotland in search of better employment opportunities and higher wages abroad. Scots, when compared to other nationalities, were very successful at settling in the countries of destination. The reasons for this were:

- The Scots were considered to have a very strong work ethic
- They could easily adapt to the harsher climates of other countries
- They formed their own communities and helped each other
- The skills and knowledge of the Scottish emigrants could be used to improve existing farms

Sir John Lorde Macleod spoke at the Annual Dinner on 22.2.1923:

*'The Highlander has been a great builder of Empire ... Hundreds ... are again on the move for overseas, and we all wish these loyal and sturdy men the best of fortune in their homes in the new countries'*.

At the Jubilee Dinner on 9.3.1921 General D A Macfarlane CB, DSO, praised the Highlander: *'the surroundings of one's life in youth made all the difference on one's outlook in life ..... men of all countries had some form of affection and tie to their own country .... that spirit was always most prevalent and strong in Highlanders.'*

From the *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*

The decision whether to stay or go would have been life-changing, but emigration from Scotland was encouraged from both home and abroad. Many thought there was little to stay for and started afresh overseas.

We do not have a diary or letters describing life for these post-war emigrants. In the Gairloch Museum there is the diary written by Donald Macleod, originally from the Gairloch area, who emigrated as a single man in 1911. He left on June 27<sup>th</sup> and arrived on September 9<sup>th</sup>. The diary describes his journey from Scotland to London to Brisbane, Australia, where he found work. Then war was declared. Donald joined up and was killed on May 24<sup>th</sup> 1915 at Gallipoli. His adventures might mirror those who left in later years.

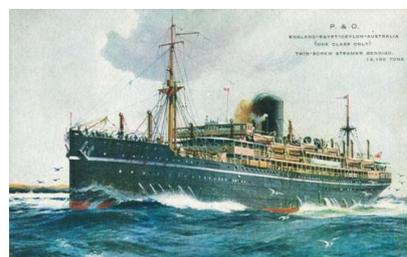
Donald had once worked as a blacksmith and then had become a policeman. But he went to Australia as a labourer. He visited Melbourne and Sydney before Brisbane and described these visits vividly. As a labourer he worked on bridges for the railway before becoming a prison warder.

For a single man the voyage and subsequent life might have been exciting. Would this have been the same for families?



In 1924 the government of British Columbia, on the west coast of Canada introduced a fisheries emigration scheme, targeting Highland fishermen. The Canadian Pacific Railway Company and the Hudson's Bay Company also ran assisted emigration schemes to Canada. The Canadian government, in 1925, aimed to attract British families by offering land to those on the '3000 Families Scheme'. However, their new life didn't always meet their expectations so many emigrants, both men and women, returned. What did they return to? Was life ever the same?

John Mackenzie, Alexander's brother, from Tornaig, Poolewe, whose occupation was in farming, emigrated to Australia on the SS Ballarat in 1922 aged 27. His journey was on the ship's maiden voyage. Where did he settle? What work did he do?



Brother Murdoch also emigrated but he went to Canada.

It appears that brothers followed brothers. Several Gairloch area men had emigrated before the war and joined regiments in their new countries. This could have led to families being 'lost' in future generations. For example here are three families:

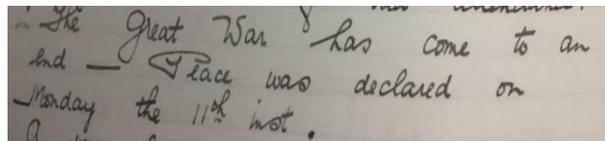
- John Macleod from Archgarve went to Canada as a labourer. His brother Murdo emigrated to Australia after the war
- Charles Mackenzie, a piper, from Coast went to Canada as a carpenter. His brother Hugh followed him
- John Macleay originally from Tighnafiline went to Canada as a labourer. In 1922 his brother Allan joined him as a joiner and their half-brother William followed in 1923. He went into farming work.

So what work might the men in the Gairloch area have done when they reached their new homes? Would those who had been fishermen have gone to British Columbia? Would those who had been crofters become farm labourers? Would it have been more difficult for families to settle than the single men? Without information in the form of letters or diaries we can only speculate.

### And Alexander Mackenzie returned to work in Gairloch.

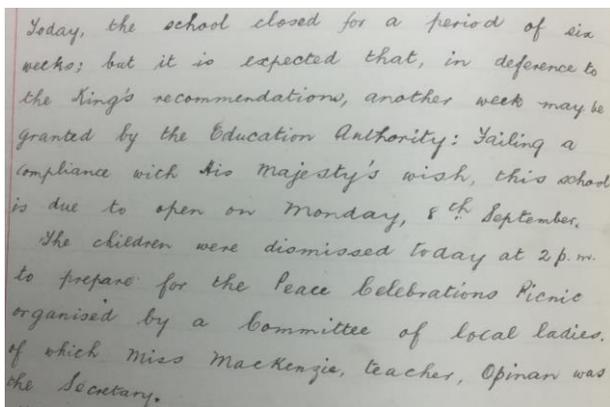
### So how was peace celebrated?

When the servicemen arrived back home were there banners and bunting to welcome them? Maybe not!



From the Poolewe School log-book:

'11 Nov 1918. Today news has come by wire that hostilities have ceased on the continent. The armistice had been signed at 11 o'clock to-day. Naturally we spent the rest of the day in discussing some of the outstanding events since 1914 and paid special attention to details re the generals and advisers which brought our troops to victory.' There is no mention of rejoicing. Was the report drafted for the benefit of the school inspector? Was peace heralded merely as relief at the end of the slaughter, from the threat to serving to serving men or an end to food shortages and travel restrictions?



An extra week was awarded to the schools in September for Peace Celebrations and in December there were school closures for Universal Thanksgiving Day for the Armistice and Thanksgiving Day for the Peace.

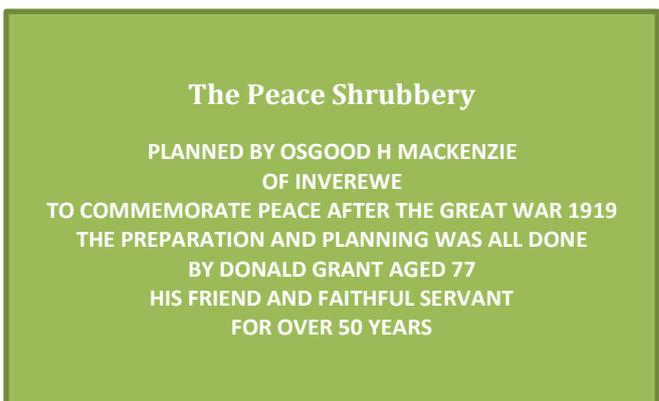
Only in the Opinar School log-book on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1919 do we read of any real celebrations.

Embroidered cards, made in France, were sent from the war. This



one from 'Johnnie' to his sister is one that celebrates peace-time. Did Alexander ever send one like this?

Osgood Mackenzie who owned Inverewe Garden commemorated the peace by having a stone erected which can still be seen today as a physical reminder. Donald Grant was Osgood's gardener.



Another small snippet of information comes from Robert Hanbury, Osgood Mackenzie's son-in-law, who wrote in July 1919 'We gave all the returned soldiers and their fancy ladies a day on Loch Maree. They had bonfire at Poolewe on Peace night which was very wet.' Did everyone enjoy this we might wonder?

### A local hero!

And one returning soldier, our Alexander Mackenzie, received a hero's welcome in the old Drill Hall in Poolewe.

This was a 'most enjoyable function.' Robert Hanbury was the Chairman of the Presentation Committee which wished to 'mark the extreme pride and satisfaction' with which the community regarded Alexander Mackenzie.



Robert Hanbury presented Alexander with 'a beautifully designed gold locket bearing a suitable inscription, a number of war saving certificates, and a well-filled purse of treasury notes' in recognition of his 'meritorious services ... in the titanic struggle against the Kaiser and his hordes'. There were speeches and dancing with bagpipes, violin and accordion.

Newspaper reports were fulsome in their praise for the event. But although it was obviously a very happy and harmonious occasion one writer reported that 'altogether the night was one that is not likely to be forgotten soon, the only regret expressed being that more gatherings of this jolly nature are not possible of being held in a place where there is so little doing away from ordinary routine ... affording young people an opportunity of meeting together, and thus making life brighter and happier'. This shows that life was more work than play.



One of those who attended was Kenneth Maclean from Riverside whose father was the blacksmith. We have met him earlier.

PRESENTED to C.S.M. A.MACKENZIE 1/4 Seaforths  
by his Friends in Poolewe & District along with a number of  
war saving Certificates and a Purse of Treasury Notes, in  
recognition of his having won the D.C.M. in FRANCE 1918.

### And life went on for those who chose to stay in the area.

One final local peacetime activity: Gairloch was obviously a peaceful place as the Prime Minister, Lloyd George, visited it in 1921. He stayed at Flowerdale for rest and recuperation. While he was there he was treated to a Charlie Chaplin film which was brought by projectionists who spent 60 hours on the round trip from London!

Alexander returns to Poolewe and makes it his home. At first jobless he later finds part-time work at Inveran, the big house along the River Ewe, opposite his house. During World War 2 he works at the Boom where he dies in 1952.

**Maybe just being home was peace enough!**



War memorials in Kinlochewe, Poolewe, Aultbea and Gairloch were erected in later years to commemorate those who had lost their lives.

