

Dear Jack

I have just finished reading all your books, I enjoyed them all, particularly John Milne's. It was very good indeed. In the Poems of the North East the Coronach to the fallen of the 5.7 Gordons reminded me of the First World War and the 5th Gordons of which you will remember dad was RSM or its equivalent in those days, and Jimmy was a L/Cpl. Since you are such a youthful chap perhaps I should explain how I came to be involved in it.

You see, when I was 14 (in 1913) I went to Methlick H G School. I was there only one day and I did not like it and somehow, I don't know how, I managed to persuade Ma and Dad and Sandy Pir that I was wasting my time, stayed on at Tarves P S until the job of Tarves Telegraph Messenger turned up and I took it. Mind you I think Ma and Dad were persuaded because they spent a lot of time trying to persuade Sandy to join the Ordnance Corps and at the end of it all, he up-anchored and went to Maud as an apprentice baker. So maybe they were a bit chary about pushing me in case I did something daft.

When I went to the Post Office, it was also a small general shop and a Druggist. Bearded John Massie was the Druggist. In no time I was able to send and receive telegrams. Thought I was a right clever lad. There was a kind of upright clock for receiving messages and a flat brass kind of clock on a stand, with letters and figures on the face and a handle at the side to turn when sending messages. A clever chap me. (twice) Well I was still there when the War clouds gathered July and August 1914. The first alarming thing was the call up of the Army and Navy reservists, and there were a lot of them – Tolquhon, Courstone, Keithfield, Shethin and many more all over the place. I think old mother Sleigh must have had some sympathy for the men, their wives and families because instead of getting the extra help to deliver the notices she told me to deliver them all myself. It took me two days from morning till 10pm to deliver and a sad, sad job it was. Men, wives and families all apprehensive, worried and sad. The best thing I remember was the plate of Rasps and Cream Mother Sleigh gave me when I finished at night. I earned my 7/- a week that week. The next event was even worse. The Territorials were mobilised and the 5th Gordons were among the first to go, and that of course included Dad and our Jimmy. At the same time there were three local lads were mobilised with the 4th Gordons. They were John Sutherland, just graduated MA, Jimmy White, Tolquhon and Gordon Munro the Doctors son. Sad to say none of them came back. It was a brave brave sight to see the Tarves Company march away, but a shock for all of us left behind to find that so few men between the ages of 17 and 30 were left in the Parish. Many of those who went away were under age. Bob Hendry was only 16. They kept him back and made him a piper. Our Jimmy was only 17 but he and the others of his age group elected to stay with the Battalion and went to France in May 1915 with the 51st Division. Dad being overage was Commissioned Lieut Quartermaster of 2/5th Gordons which became a feeder unit for the Gordon Battalions in France. As soon as Dad got into a fixed Station, Ma gathered you young ones together and went to join him. Oddy and I soldiered on in the Armoury together but Dad did come back several months later and persuaded me, without much difficulty, to go into Aberdeen to the

McRobbs and attend Burnets Civil Service College. All this made me think what a well planned village Tarves was. Most villages have a through road and a few houses dotted on either side. The Kirk was built about 1810, the Row of houses where Postie Morrice stayed built about 1850/1860. It would have been interesting to see what the Village was like before that. As a boy I went to a roup at Sandy Hay's house. The only thackit hoose in the village, Pat Fowler took it over until he moved to Gibb's old shop next to the Post Office, then Duthies or JD demolished it and built two houses one of which Hooky Duncan occupied. The old Village pump was a centre of attraction, especially priming it in a drought.

Well, I've enjoyed scribbling this lot and hope you have found something of interest in it. I'll see what I can do to get your bookies back for which many thanks. Meantime I'm on my second treatment, only time will tell how they go.

Love to you both.

Yours

Widdie

Had a note from Bunt, she had enjoyed Sandry Leslie's visit.