

Life at the Clachan in a past day.....

Strachur a Little Highland village on the shores of Loch Fyne

2-14-2021

Strachur is a village in Argyll

The Campbells of Strachur owned land since the early 13th century. In 1770, General John Campbell, commander of British forces in America, 17th Chief, built Strachur Park.

The first recorded reference to the smiddy is 1797.

William Montgomery 1776 - 1859

Dugald Montgomery 1812 – 1887

William Montgomery 1847 – 1926

John Montgomery 1885 – 1976

Census 1841

William Montgomery 64yrs Smith

Dugald 26yrs

Jean 22 yrs

Elizabeth Livingston 16yrs F.S

Church records 1848

Wm. Montgomery Blacksmith, Clachan

Dugald-son

Jane Mc Kenzie- wife

John

William (children)

Dugald

Mrs. Mc Kenzie innkeeper Clachan

John Mc Call grandchildren

Ann Montgomery

Marion Henderson servant

Ann Campbell “

Dond. Mc Laurin “

1861 Census Records for Strachur Clachan

Dugald Montgomery 48 yrs. Blacksmith/Postmaster

Jane wife 40 yrs.

William son 16yrs. Blacksmith Apprentice

Dugald son 13yrs

Colin son 7 yrs.

Alexander Gillies Lodger 67 yrs. Postmaster between Glendarroch and Strachur

Colin Mc Ewing Lodger 70 yrs. Postmaster between Kilfinnan and Strachur



William Montgomery	1847 – 1926
Davie Montgomery	1882 – 1967
William Montgomery	1876 – 1903
Murray Montgomery	1878 – 1951
Dugie Montgomery	1880 – 1913
John Montgomery	1885 – 1976

DEATH OF STRACHUR'S VILLAGE BLACKSMITH.

6th - 1915
We regret to announce the death of Mr William Montgomery, Strachur, which occurred about eleven o'clock on Wednesday night. The deceased, who had been in indifferent health for the last six months, had attained fourscore years. Born at Strachur, he passed his life in his native village, having succeeded to the business of blacksmith carried on by his father, and prior to that by his grandfather. He was a contractor for carrying the mails for over sixty years—from Cairndow to Strachur and Strathlachlan (when the mails were brought by coach by Rest-and-be-Thankful), and afterwards between St Catherines and Strachur and Strathlachlan. Later he carried the mails between Strachur and Kilmun. Besides acting as the village blacksmith, he had a good knowledge of horses and cattle, which he was ever ready to place at the disposal of those who consulted him. Mr Montgomery was well known and highly respected in the Cowal district and throughout the County. He had the misfortune to lose his wife about thirty years ago. Three sons and two daughters are left to mourn his loss.

At one time there were 14 horses at Clachan for hiring, carting and the mail run. These were commandeered for the First World War.



John Montgomery in the middle.

There were cars too, pre-1914: the Arrol – Johnston “dog cart” and in 1909, SB2; a “white” SB197 made in Cleveland, Ohio and bought from the MacDonalds of Glenbranter Estate.

During the war, a Ford Model T was in use and the first charabanc in Argyll was at Clachan. It was registered in Lanarkshire V286 – had solid tyres and carried 14 passengers.



1901

Post Office

William Montgomery 54 years Blacksmith/Postmaster
William son 24 years Blacksmith
David " 18 years Coach Driver
John " 15 years Post Office worker
John Cowan servant 25 years Carter
Sarah McLean servant 48 years

Mr David Bryce Montgomery.

A member of one of the oldest families in Cowal, Mr David B. Montgomery, passed away at the Clachan, Strachur, in his 85th year.

Mr Montgomery, who was a son of the late Mr and Mrs William Montgomery, was unmarried. He spent his early years in the family smithy, which dated back until 1715.

For many years Mr Montgomery drove the mail-coach between Strachur and Kilmun, and latterly between the Clachan and Dunoon, first with horses and later motor-cars. He held an Argyll County Council driving licence longer than probably any other man.

In partnership with his brother, Mr John Montgomery, he took over the family business in 1919, and as William Montgomery & Sons pioneered Ford salesmanship in the County. Many purchasers of Model T cars were taught to drive by Mr Montgomery on taking delivery of their car. At that time Ford cars sold for just over £125, and were mostly touring models, with fabric hoods, and had foot gear change. In his younger days Mr Montgomery was a keen shinty enthusiast. He is survived by his brother, Mr John Montgomery.

17 January 1967

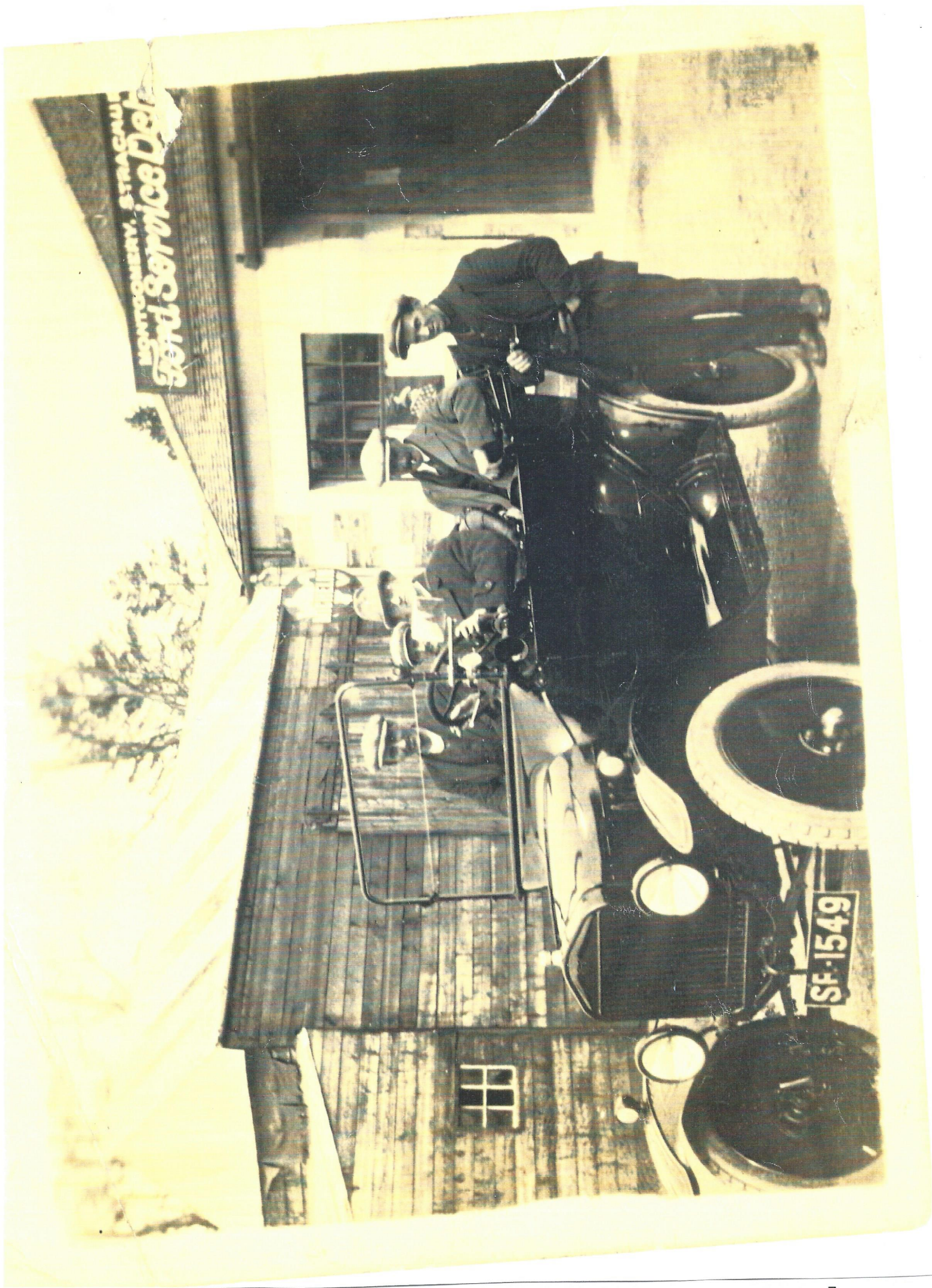


Around 1920-21, a garage was built by Mungo Sinclair, Furnace and the business of Wm. Montgomery and Sons, Ford Agent was formed. In time, this was a main Ford Dealership until 1970



L-R
(unknown) John Montgomery, Davie Montgomery





Public transport continued progressing from horse and coach to charabanc to buses-between St, Catherine's (connecting) with the Inveraray ferry and Dunoon. The end of this side of the business was in the 1960s – pre -subsidy days and impossible to continue offering a service.





John Montgomery's letter to Cathie, in Canada.

Well now, to the smiddie. I remember being in the smiddie one morning with your grandfather, when a gentleman walked in with a hard hat and umbrella. Put his foot up on the anvil....we called it 'the steady'. ...and when your grandfather turned, he introduced himself. From P. McCallum & Sons, Greenock who supplied the iron and coal....That he had come to see the smiddie that was longest in their books, and still in them. I think he was one of the Lithgows who are in shipping now and have an estate near Tarbert.

I had your friend Mr. McKechnie in on Saturday and he was keenly interested to hear how you were doing. He retires in June. You must be smiling at me, from the mantelpiece, as I do my gymnastics - touch my toes a dozen times! The smiddie must be 200 years old. Built likely from the stones on the shore and lime. I remember McNicol, the mason, from the Bay when the PO was re-built, getting a row for using lime instead of cement and had to scrape it off. The walls must be 2' thick. As you remember, there are 2 pigeon holes for holding tools etc. Then the hearth will be about 1' wide and 6' in height to a wide chimney with a bellows at either side which was required for carts and machine wheels. That was some job. Had to be welded to the exact size. Only your grandfather could make a job of it. The 2 fires were in full blast and 2 men with tongs. Carried it across to where you granite, flat stone, circular with a hole in the middle to allow for the shape of the wheel. Then water cooled it off carefully. Making wheels had to have the ring drilled and fitted with counter sunk bolts. That is where the bench and heavy vice were brought into use and what a job it was. Then to the anvil - heavy and light - with iron stands on either side to hold the numerous tools required. You will know the smith is the only complete tradesman. He can make all the tools he requires.

Well, the horses. A good man should handle them, lifting their legs and going through all the actions that the smith does. When a smith lifts a leg for the first time, dressing the hoof with a rasp level to suit the shoe. I have on a few occasions seen your grandfather down in front of Andersons before he let the foot down. (It was the custom that the farmer had to supply a bolt of whisky. It would be 2/6 then) and the price, the incredible price was 4/- per set and paid at the Term time. Do you wonder we have aye been hard up! We got 5/- a set from Loch Eck Coaches but if a horse cast a shoe, we had to go down to Creggans Pier and fit it free. Farm horses once in 3 months, they having had the shoe, both heels bent sharply to grip the road. Still 4/-.

In the early days, the nails were roughly stamped. The smith cut or lengthened to the proper size. When a horse came in for a set of shoes, the old nails were cut off with a chisel and hammer. Hoof was rasped down flat and fitted hot to see if suited nicely; altered to shape, cooled and fitted. Half an hour or so. A stock of all sizes was built up when not busy. Jeck Dougall, a mason (Bessie's uncle, second house in High Clachan), he spent nearly every night at the Clachan and after tea, your grandfather and Jeck went out to the smiddie and made shoes til 9o/c. We would make tea and listen to the notables of an older Strachur. Jeck had an amazing memory and used to celebrate at times. Jeck would come away with....

'It is quite true what Spurgeon says,
"Convince a man against his will,
He will be of the same opinion still."

We got coal along with iron from McCallums Greenock but sometimes when Maggie McCallum's father, St. Catherine's, had a load coming in, we would take a ton on his boat, the 'Catherine McColl'. House coal was around a 1/- per ton.

The bench is used for any filing jobs which are held on the vice and when any drilling to be done. There is a long piece of timber with iron plates full of small depressions where the top end of the drill is placed and holds it while the cutting end of the drill is over the vice where the job to be drilled is held in the vice. There is a handle with a lever which allows you to detach and place it where next hole to be drilled..

Underneath the bellows is where the coal was kept. Above the bellows is a kind of shelf. Beneath the hearth, there is a tub for water to cool a job. Yes, leather sheepskin to save your breeches. The second bellows was only used when wheels having irons put on.

Fire was easily lit with a tuft of hay.

There was Davie McGowan, a great blacksmith who regularly came every 3 months. A week was about the length he would stay. I was his hammerman and built-up a stock of shoes. He was a splendid singer but costly to get started. Something like Davie Bell. I miss him badly. Agnes Bell has recovered quickly. Cathie was here and must have been a great help. Had a note from Mrs. Lohead. I sent her a couple of chickens from Feorline, but never arrived. She is in a bad way herself and due for an operation in a few days. They managed to get Willie into a Home.

Adjoining the Smiddy was the Post Office

March
1969

**POST OFFICE LINK BROKEN
AFTER 129 YEARS.**

A long period of service with the Postal Service terminated recently with the retirement of the Montgomery family from Strachur Post Office.

Four generations of the family have been connected with the service ~~since Rowland~~
~~Montgomery, postmaster, Strachur, in 1740.~~

During that time they have provided a post office service in the Clachan, and for many years carried the mail between St. Catherines, Inveraray, Lochgoilhead, Strachur, Kilmun, and Dunoon. In early days the mails came via Dalmally, a horse-coach being in use.

The last member of the family to be associated with Strachur Post Office was Miss Margaret Montgomery, who retired some time ago, and left this country last week-end to join her sister, Miss Cathie Montgomery, who is a teacher in Vancouver, Canada.



Margaret Montgomery

Extracts from letters written by John Montgomery to his daughter, Cathie, in 1970.....

“You are forgetting very few folks could write in those days and fewer still had a penny in their pocket. They hardly knew any person outside their own village. When I took over the P.O., the Sounder (morse code) was in Inveraray, and Loch Awe was on the same circuit to Glasgow. We had the A.B.C. with a round disc of the alphabet. You wound it and at the same time put your finger over the letter you wanted and sent it to Strathlachlan, St.Catherine’s, Lochgoil and Carrick. A slow job when the herring came regularly up Lochfyne – the Screws as we called the steamers who came in to buy the herring in the morning let their owners know how much they had and if a heavy catch, they would make for Greenock. In those days, not many used the Telegram even though only a 6d. for 12 words. When Mrs. Plowden came * on the scene, poor old Plowden would be up with a sheaf and kept me busy – scowling all the time. It was Chrissie Douglas I took over from. I don’t suppose your grandfather had any time for that. He went on horseback to Cairndow and met the Campbeltown mail which left Glasgow at 10pm and Cairndow at 6am. He had to ford the burns. When the parcel post came, he was supplied with a small dog-cart painted red and V.Regina painted on it and shaped like a box on wheels, tapered to make a seat for the driver only, so that he couldn’t give a poor soul a lift in those hungry days. He carried a gun and shot roe deer which were plentiful. The old roadman, DonachaBan, the Bay, looked after them and got them down in the dark. (Jimmy Bell’s grandfather). This would carry on till the Lochgoil steamer came on. Old Hugh Cameron at St.Catherine’s ran a coach daily and we ran a wagonette daily to St.Catherine’s. In later years, twice-daily up till we ran to Kilmun daily. Dan Smith drove it for a time. Had a note from his girls yesterday. I remember every September and October, he and one of the Leitches went up the Cur (I refer to your grandfather). He kept a tub full of salmon, salted for the winter and regularly went out nights and shot pheasant and hare. It had to be done in these days.”

“Postal orders and stamps would only come on later. It would really only be the lairds who made use of the Post. The hours to begin with were 7.30am to 8pm. In my time it was 8am to 8pm. No time off for meals and Sunday, 9am to 10pm. Later on the mail came by steamer from Greenock to Lochgoil and later the railway to Dalmailly. The Glendaruel mail went from here.”

In a letter (1969) to his niece, Maymie Rose, talking about handwriting:

“.....dreadful to be in too big a hurry. I made the same mistake myself in the days when we made out lists for every parcel the postman took out which he had to sign for, and get a signature from the owner too. I remember on one occasion someone discussing writing and Sandy the Post saying, ‘Joni was a fine writer if you could read it!’ Sandy’s was splendid: thin upright and heavy down. What service he gave the PO. His wage at one time was 12/- a week. He put in for 15/- A surveyor arrived and he was driven from St.Catherine’s by Sutherland the Hotelkeeper. Sandy was offered 14/- and told to go out and consider it. Of course he went in to the smiddy where Sutherland and my father were. He was instructed to go in and tell the surveyor unless he got 20/-, he would give up the job. He got it! Some years later in your uncle Bob’s time, (Inveraray PO), they undertook to supply a bike. Bob must have been reading up the rules and found he was over the age. They agreed to allow him 1/6 a week for cleaning his own bike!

* The Plowden family owned Strachur Estate 1898 - 1918/20

I think a monument should be erected for Sandy and the Montgomerys and the figure should be a "White Slave". Myself, for instance, took over when I was 14 or so, around 1900. Had a few hours off for King Edward's coronation which didn't take place. Took a trip to Inveraray in the new Turbine along with the poor McVicar, the mason who I saw killed on the top of the bridge on his way back from the Review. Those few hours were the only time I ever had off from P.O. Wasn't I grateful when Dr. Campbell got me to play for Furnace and Jim Cameron relieved me and didn't he enjoy the trip."

Letter from Maymie Rose to her uncle, John Montgomery... 1969

"I was interested to hear of Sandy's pay. I remember him coming into the Clachan with his bag. The lights were on, so he must have had dreadful hours, as he would have to cycle home afterwards. I was the grateful recipient of a box of snowdrops from him every Spring, for years. How patient he was, picking them, packing them, and now I know, paying postage out of his hard-earned paltry pay."

Sandy Post-

When we meet a Man of Letters
we classify him with our betters
for him we have a due regard
- unless the Heart, a trifle hard -

I do trust you, I love to see
that Twice a Day appears to me
and unto others round the Coast
whom we address as "Sandy Post".

~~Some men have "letters" in their Head~~
of no Address - I've heard it said
but Sandy's are in it - Condensed
within his Bag and will be addressed.

The Lads and Lassies short or tall
who meet "Love Doves" at Dance or Ball
slip Sandy letters without fear
beginning with "my dearest - dear".

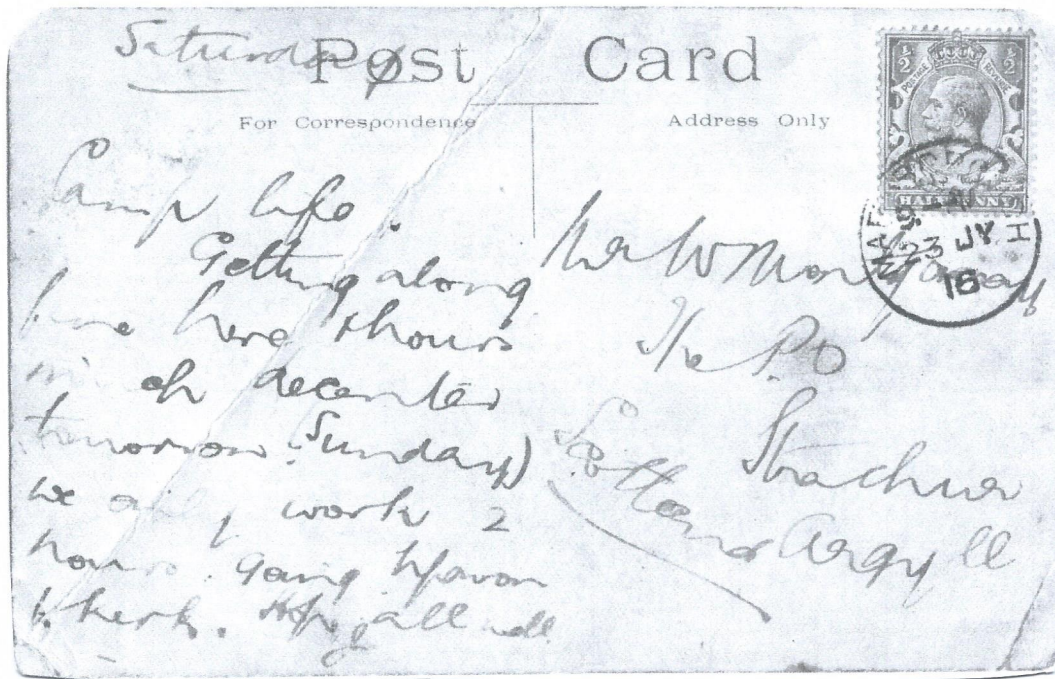
Experience has made Sandy wise
and very sharp about the Eyes
we can see Shadows through "the mist"
of correspondents being kissed.

Then we must all wish Sandy well -
A good going Bike, and lots of "Shell"
For want of Spirit men get lost -
Just at the time they need it most -

Now Sandy's Spirit is all right -
His Wit, and Wis-dom, full of light -
By Calm, and Caution, all the while
Deep read in "Letters," and Argyll.

~~I must not fail now get -~~
to mention "Queenie" Sandy's pet -
Since she is such a faithful friend
An extra "P.S." must be penned.

Of all the Dogs she bears "the Belle"
And understands the Gaelic well
From point of nose to tip of tail
An Escort of "the Royal Mail".



John Montgomery, Royal Flying Cops July 1916
 A card to his father: Mr. W. Montgomery, The P.O. Strachur, Argyll, Scotland
 "Camp life: Getting along fine here and hours much decenter.
 Tomorrow (Sunday) we only work 2 hours. Goingto kirk"



The famous Furnace team of 1923 deserves its place in the archives

Back Row- L-R5th John Montgomery

OBITUARY. 64.76

Mr John Montgomery of Strachur

With the passing last Tuesday of Mr John Montgomery of Strachur, in his ninety-first year, we have lost one of the pioneers of the motor trade in Scotland; one of the dwindling band of volunteers who fought for their country in the Royal Flying Corps, and later in the Royal Air Force, in the two World Wars of 1914 and 1939; an outstanding sportsman and athlete; a Justice of the Peace; an upholder of what is best in our way of life and a member of a family whose roots go back a very long way in Argyllshire's history.

His mother was a Turner of Craighoyle, an Estate and Barony they had held for centuries. There is a strong tradition that they sheltered the Bruce at Craighoyle in 1309, before the Battle of Bannockburn.

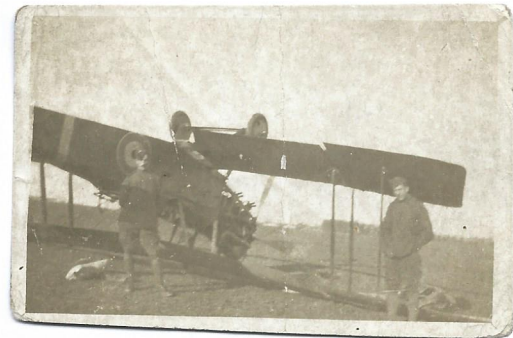
John Montgomery, a Vice-President of the Camanachd Association, was the youngest of the five Montgomery brothers. The others being Willie, Murray, Dougie, and Davie, who were all fine shinty players. Mr Montgomery had the distinction of playing for the victorious Furnace team when they won the Camanachd Cup in 1923, without a single score against them throughout the entire season.

Like his father before him, he served for a long period as a Justice of the Peace for the County of Argyll, and carried on an old tradition, going back over many generations, of public service by the family, in a land and among a people to whom they were deeply attached.

His father, the late Mr William Montgomery, buried the last leper in the Lazaretto in Sandbank, with the help of the late Mr Donald Wilkie, a Kirk elder of Sandbank, who offered up the committal prayer. Understandably, these rites had to be performed under cover of darkness, and after the long haul from Strachur.

And so we bid farewell to this generous and great-hearted man, who never failed to temper the wind to the shorn lamb. He is survived by his wife, Agnes; his son, Willie; his daughters Margaret and Cathie, and his draughter-in-law, Margaret, and three grand-children.

Prior to the interment on Thursday afternoon the funeral service was held in Strachur Church, conducted by the Rev. F. S. Banks. So great was the company of mourners that the church and passages were full and several ladies and gentlemen had to wait outside the doorway.





Early 1950s a visit to the Strachur family from the Canadian cousins, Mary and Hattie



**STRACHUR SMIDDY
MUSEUM and CRAFT SHOP**

re-opens for 24th season
AUGUST and SEPTEMBER
SAT/SUN 1pm -4pm
Entrance by donation