

**A GLANTON ASSEMBLY AND  
THE SECOND WORLD WAR:  
THE OLD SCHOOL HOUSE, EDINBURGH**

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**Introduction**

This is a follow-up, a response prompted by Elisabeth Wilson's fascinating article on the Brethren in World War I, which, following Rae, notes that the Open Brethren were the least explicitly non-combatant during that conflict.<sup>1</sup> By implication, the Exclusives, of whom the Glanton party was one small group, were more likely to seek exemption from military service on the grounds of conscience. Not all did, but a proportion certainly. But in 1939, when war again came, was this still the picture? And if not, why not? What had changed? One view, that of a knowledgeable writer, is that conscientious objectors were far less common in World War II than in World War I, with more acceptance of obeying the state, and that the imperative of wartime service was accepted, as was what followed — national service—albeit with 'a groan'.<sup>2</sup> There is also a need to evaluate the impact of the war on the assemblies, during and after; how they continued to function with so many of their young men away, and the disruption, for example, to their traditional patterns of peripatetic ministry. The focus here is on the experience of one

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1. Elisabeth Wilson, "The eyes of the authorities are upon us": the Brethren and World War I, *BAHNR*, Vol. 3, no. 1 (2004), pp.2-17; John Rae, *Conscience and Politics: The British Government and the conscientious objector to military service 1916-1919* (London, 1970). On the general background see Felicity Goodall, *A Question of Conscience: conscientious objection during the two World Wars* (Sutton, 1997).

2. Communication from Dr G.A.C. Binnie, 2008. His uncle Willie, a familiar figure at the Glanton quarterly meetings in the 1960s, had enlisted in 1916, and was gassed; his father Walter had also enlisted but was expelled as underage.

Glanton assembly in Edinburgh, the Old Schoolhouse, in the south-western district of Morningside, which may have been broadly representative of that party and the many, mostly small assemblies, and of one leading family, who had long been part of the Glanton fabric, and were to continue so after 1945. What happened within their number, and they were a large family network, is arguably a proxy for what happened across the board.

Such an approach is, of course, open to challenge, but it is dictated by the availability—or unavailability—of the sources which might enable a wider perspective and cross-checking. The Glanton party kept no centralised records, there were no minuted annual conferences, nor boards of strategy or ministry, and the magazine *Scripture Truth*<sup>3</sup> was mainly devotional in content. It is hard indeed to track even in outline the progress of individual assemblies, though something might be drawn from the newsletters indicating where and when area meetings for ministry were to be held. Individual assemblies kept neither lists of membership comparable to those cited by Dickson for the Open Brethren<sup>4</sup> nor offered annual reviews of their work. The historian is thrown back on a patchwork of sources: sermons, letters and in this case, family photograph albums, augmented by recollection and family lore. Oral history is dangerously deceptive territory, made worse by time's passage, and yet it can help and illumine. Corroboration adds credibility to its currency. But, *faut de mieux*, it is part of the record of the past, and without some use of it—cautious rather than credulous—the history of what and who will fade away entirely.<sup>5</sup> There is straw which can be made into some kind of bricks, but it needs to be gathered now. Few of the Glanton meetings are now in numerical health, and a

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3. On its thirty-fifth volume in 1945, *Scripture Truth*, “*Thy Word is Truth*” was published by the Central Bible Truth Depot, London (later Wooler and then Morpeth).

4. Neil T.R. Dickson, *Brethren in Scotland 1838-2000* (Milton Keynes, 2002) pp. 382ff.

5. I should like to acknowledge the assistance given by a number of correspondents, who have taken the time to respond to letters of enquiry, including Theo Balderston, Susan Beckley and Joan Ross. This particular article is intended as a starting point for a consideration of Glanton history post-World War II.

number have closed, including the one in Glanton, Northumberland, itself. There were some fifty or so in 1948—perhaps more—but now, sixty years later, there are but a handful.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Old Schoolhouse: A Glanton Assembly**

The Old School House (OSH) was an Edinburgh Glanton assembly that had been meeting in that hall in Morningside, as the name implies, a former school, since c.1900. The main strength of the Glanton party lay, as the name suggests, in Northumberland where it had a strong following amongst the farming community, but it also had a firm presence amongst the fishing communities of East Lothian, Fife and the Moray Coast, and down to Lowestoft. Other assemblies were in Glasgow, Aberdeen and Newcastle, Manchester, Stockport and London. In Edinburgh there were several meetings, including the ‘New Gallery’ in Shandwick Place, and Wolston Hall in Leith. The Glanton party were a breakaway in the 1890s<sup>7</sup> from the London party or Exclusives, and were themselves to splinter; there was the little Glanton division of 1938 and further secession in Edinburgh of the Willie Reid party in 1940, which caused deep wounds. Whether you regard them as a loose or tight grouping of assemblies is a matter of perspective, but they were certainly not monochromatic. There were some differences in interpretation and practice and indeed in attitudes but what they held in common was doctrinal, firmly scriptural, and with heavy emphasis on prophetic, scriptural teaching. They were partly defined by who they were, partially also by who they were

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6. In 1948 an overture was made to the Kelly-Lowe brethren to seek reconciliation. The letter of approach was signed by the leading figures of some thirty Glanton assemblies from Surrey to Findochty; I have no way of knowing how many assemblies were not associated with this (unsuccessful) initiative.

7. See Christian Brethren Archive, John Rylands University Library of Manchester University, Neil Dickson Collection, Box 115, 2/16/9 [W.R Dronsfield], ‘The Brethren after 1870’; also available online at [http://www.biblecentre.org/topics/wrd\\_brethren\\_since\\_1870.htm](http://www.biblecentre.org/topics/wrd_brethren_since_1870.htm), W.R. Dronsfield, ‘The Brethren since 1870, section 4 Ecclesiasticism established: The Glanton Division’. [accessed November 2009].

not—from what and whom they had split away. There was no defined written creed but an understood and articulated set of positions; strict adherence to the, Little Flock hymnbook, the King James Version, and to ‘Mr Darby’ and his ‘new translation’. The different assemblies were brought together by quarterly and annual meetings hosted in various localities; and approved brothers could be and were booked for every Sunday at one meeting or another. Where, and how often one was invited to speak was a mark of acceptance, and indeed a subtle form of inducing conformity. One speaker from the OSH, which became rather progressive in the 1960s (e.g. allowing the use of an organ at the evening gospel meeting, and may always have been somewhat ‘liberal’) found his invitations to Cockenzie, a stronghold of the traditional order, withdrawn. There was some room for debate—at Bible readings, but within firm limits. Inter-marriage and kinship were the order of the day amongst the Glanton people, as with all minority traditions, and few married outside the meeting,<sup>8</sup> or if they did marry outside the meeting, thereafter stayed within the ranks. They were socially conservative and largely uninterested in politics, local or national.

The OSH’s core of regular attenders<sup>9</sup> in the 1930s was perhaps about 150 or so. It followed the standard assembly template of morning meeting, Bible reading and gospel service, with a large Sunday school, young people’s meeting (YPM) and hospital outreach. A significant family in the 1930s was that of the Rosses who had been associated with the OSH meeting since its earliest years. Alexander Ross was a head baker, who had moved to Edinburgh in the 1870s and had risen to become managing director of MacVitties Guest & Co., a very successful bakery & confectionary business with restaurant and tea rooms in the west end of Edinburgh. The stereotypical view of Brethren women was that they were silent in the assembly, subordinate and indeed suppressed, but Alexander’s wife Jessie was no cipher. It was she who vetoed his intention as ‘just

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8. Divorce, however, was not unknown, though very rare. There was one meeting family in the 1940s where both the daughters married, divorced and remarried.

9. There was no register of those who were in full fellowship, i.e. welcome to break bread.

pride' to add the word Ross to MacVitties Guest (both those interests having been bought out) or to move to a large house with a tennis court.<sup>10</sup> This family firm passed on his death in 1930 to his son, Alec, then aged 41 and with a family of seven (to become eight in 1931 with the birth of the final child Joan). All of them were in the meeting along with Alexander's brothers, David and John,<sup>11</sup> an unmarried sister Jean, and Margaret, married to James Durie who had died in October 1929 after an accident at the early age of 52, leaving her to bring up five children. To Alec's brood, and their cousins the Duries, was added Maimie, David's daughter, then in her teens, and effectively incorporated into the wider family, because of her mother's continuing incapacity which saw her institutionalised. There was, therefore, a substantial presence to the Ross connection at the OSH, of parents and children, aunts and cousins, friends and hangers-on. As was dryly remarked, at the OSH the clan system was far from dead, a characteristic true of other Brethren meetings, and indeed doubtless in other denominations. Faith and family were intertwined ('The grace runs in the blood'); they worshipped together, mixed socially, and indeed holidayed as a group. Where the younger generation differed was in their level of education and career choice; some continued in the family firm but by the later 1930s the Ross clan could also muster several with degrees in accountancy, law and medicine, the last a particularly popular discipline with the younger Glanton men, often with a view to service in the mission field. And even with some women: in 1942 Joey (Joanna) Durie was in her first

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10. Information from the late Graham Ross, youngest son (b.1928) of Alec Ross. Graham, who died in 2009, was a stalwart of the OSH, superintendent of the Sunday Schools at Morningside and Oxfords. As a director of MacVitties and later chairman in Scotland of the Prince's Trust, he was widely respected, as was his sporting prowess, being capped several times at rugby for Scotland.

11. There was a third brother, Will, who had emigrated to Canada, over whom there was a question mark. On a return visit to Edinburgh it rained solidly for three days, and one of his sisters said to him, "Will, you must be a Jonah," at which the other cut in: "Ah no, Jeannie, Jonah was a man of God."

year of medicine at Edinburgh University There were also others who were training in veterinary and dental studies.

Of the older generation in the 1930s at the OSH, David Ross stood out in Glanton circles, as a ‘weighty brother’, a person in a supposedly non-hierarchical group whose views commanded respect. What he and his brothers (Alexander and John) of military age had done during the First World War is not firmly established. John’s shakes—which made his teeing up at golf an ordeal to watch—and inability to concentrate was explained within the family by his experiences as a stretcher bearer.<sup>12</sup> David was a Conscientious Objector and served in the Pioneers Corps, based at a Camp (Kirkliston?) in West Lothian. A schoolteacher by profession,<sup>13</sup> he was a graduate of the University of Edinburgh and taught history at Boroughmuir Corporation School for many years. He was an able speaker, who was widely used, a regular at the Glanton annual conferences—and held the licence to marry. Fluent in German—his shelves contained many books in the old high Gothic script—he had a considerable ministry amongst the Brethren on the Continent<sup>14</sup> but particularly in Germany, visiting there every year, of which some memory was to linger post-war.<sup>15</sup> Unfortunately his preaching diaries,

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12. There are two pieces of corroboration to this. His daughter Maimie acquired a broad West Lothian accent as a child, while he was at camp there, and in an address in April 1923 at the Hall, Belleisle Street, Glasgow, he referred to his trying to make ‘in a certain camp a road of ashes and we were making a terrible mess of the beautiful green field’

13. According to the 1901 census, the 18-year-old David was a ‘student, Training College’. Edward Marston, *Prison: Five Hundred years of life behind bars* (Surrey: National Archives, 2009), p.192, notes that conchies who had gone to prison suffered discrimination post-war: ‘Government appointments were closed to them and most teaching posts were beyond the reach of a pacifist with a criminal record’.

14. In an address that was published in *Scripture Truth*, 35 (1915-1947), p 67, on the ‘House of God’, David Ross said that he had had the privilege of speaking to ‘a little company of Royal Catholics in Belgium.’ I am grateful to the Depot for copies of this and other writings of his published in this period. David Ross was not the only Glanton brother to visit Germany, David Mears being another.

15. On a visit to Switzerland c.1970 Theo Balderston (personal communication) met an elderly brother from Düsseldorf whose fifty-year-old son quizzed him about David Ross, who ‘had obviously made a great impression on him’.

which are known to have existed, have since disappeared, and little can be said to develop the detail of his work there. A photograph album, however, which belonged to his daughter Maimie, does record a visit paid by him to Germany in April 1936, accompanied by her and her 19-year-old cousin Helen Durie. They were in Hildesheim, the Harz mountains, Potsdam, Marburg, Frankfurt and Berlin, where they met Herbert, the oldest of Alec Ross' family. It is not surprising that David Ross drew on his travel and experience to illustrate his sermons in the 1930s, some of which have survived, transcribed verbatim to typescript. When his talks were published in *Scripture Truth*, the illustrative material was usually abbreviated, which means that they are less accessible to the reader than they would have been to the original listeners. His gifts for the illustration of a point, combined with an alliterative and methodical organisation of material, were distinctive to his style of ministry, and passed on to his nephew Ian, with whom he worked. After David's death in 1949 Ian was to assume a similarly important role in ministry amongst the Glanton meetings.<sup>16</sup>

#### **A Weighty Brother**

In November 1938 David Ross gave a series of addresses at the New Gallery Shandwick Place, Edinburgh on Ephesians in the first week of November 1938. World events, post-Munich, were in everyone's mind, and the possibility of war, or its probability, was concerning politicians and public alike. His German visits had particularly informed him. According to his niece Helen Durie, when they had visited in April 1936 he had been taking money for the relief of the German Brethren and was very anxious throughout their stay. When they called on his friends, the shutters were closed and the children warned not to mention their coming.<sup>17</sup> Things only got worse, or so it seems: in 1937 (a development of which he must have been aware),

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16. For example, after David's death in March 1949, Ian Ross assisted Alec at the marriage of Bob Saunderson and Joey Durie in Edinburgh on 5th November 1949

17. After the War, one of the ladies in the German assemblies paid a return visit to Edinburgh—it seems that her brother had risen high in the German Army.

all the small religious groups, including the Brethren, were forced into the *Bund freikirchlicher Christen* (Federation of Free Churches). Persecution was gathering momentum of all who were deemed ‘anti Nazi’. His opening address on 3 November 1938 repudiated any such persecution:

I was telling some people of what was happening in Germany. A particular sect called the Millennial Dawnists [The Jehovah’s Witnesses] are being hunted like wild beasts at present there. Personally I hate that doctrine, but I was shocked when these nice people said that the holders of such a heresy merited this judgement. I was shocked... [by that suggestion]

In the second address, given a week later, he mentioned visiting a place in Germany—perhaps a spa in the Harz mountains—where the waters that he had drunk had had radium in them. But then he continued:

Sometimes as one looks abroad, one shudders. Think for example of the devilry going on in Germany today. It makes us tremble to think of it. Think of ‘the horror of the war’ which Japan is carrying on with China... has God resigned the government of this world? He has not!

It would be my suggestion that his view, informed and influential—a copy of Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*<sup>18</sup> sat uneasily on his shelves amongst the Walter Scotts and the H.V. Mortons—was part of the process which swayed the younger generation away from the pacifist stance that some of the preceding generation had taken. Other Glanton men, as at Stockport, joined up from their assemblies without dissent, so it may have been more general. But clearly there were exceptions within the Glanton ranks. It would be too far to suggest that David’s role was decisive; others had visited Germany (his nephews Herbert and Lex Ross, for two) and seen the nature of Nazism for themselves, which did much to persuade those of a pacifist persuasion to reconsider their position;<sup>19</sup> some went in Edinburgh to hear Lord Halifax defend the Munich settlement and were unconvinced by the case that he made. But what may have held true for most of the Glanton party did not hold for all, nor for other sections within the Exclusive grouping. No

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18. Probably the 1937 edition in English.

19. See Goodall, *Question of Conscience*, p.94.



one from the Lowe-Kelly meetings fought in either war. According to Susan Beckley, in World War I one of her Kelly-Lowe grandfathers was a CO, and the other in the Red Cross: in World War II (and she has the photographs to confirm this) her father, along with a number of other young men from his meeting, was amongst the six thousand COs who served in the non-combatant corps. Quakers and Brethren ('forty five different sects and subdivisions of sects', according to one of their commanding officers)<sup>20</sup> worked and disputed together, along with communists, anarchists and humanists.

### **The Coming of War in 1939**

It is indisputable, however, that when war came in September 1939 most of the Glanton young men who could join up, did so when their papers came. Some were exempt by virtue of being in an essential occupation, e.g. farmers, but even amongst those who could have legitimately escaped military service, there were those who chose not to do so. Jack Purves of the well-known firm of funeral undertakers in Edinburgh, William Purves, of the New Gallery (and later Laurieston) meeting was one such, joining the navy. His father had been exempted from conscription in 1916, as the lists of exemptions for reserved occupations granted by the military tribunal confirm (these very exceptionally have survived for the City of Edinburgh). But Jack claimed no such exemption in 1939, as he might quite properly have done. Some of the younger women also played their part; Ethel Houston was to leave behind her studies at Edinburgh University in 1943 for Bletchley Park where she was to work on the interception and interpretation of German Army cipher traffic.<sup>21</sup>

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20. Goodall, *Question of Conscience*, p.118.

21. Her brother, James Houston, was also in Edinburgh Glanton circles. He was for part of the war at Edinburgh University where he recalls firewatching on the roof of the Old College. He was excused military service on health grounds, and he was to spend the latter part of the war in town planning for post-war regeneration in the Clyde valley. He was later an Oxford don before becoming Professor of Spiritual Theology at Regent College, Vancouver.

Amongst those of the OSH who joined up in 1939 were Lex Ross, Alec's oldest son, and both of Margaret Durie's sons, Andrew and Ross (my father). Their father, a commercial traveller, had not fought in World War I although whether by conviction or simply because of a medical condition (as mentioned above, he was to die relatively young in 1929 aged 52) is not known. But my father did serve, joining up in 1939, leaving his legal practice to be commissioned in the Royal Tanks Regiment. Sent out with C squadron, 4th RTR, he was to become a prisoner of war (POW) in June 1941, and then exchanged in 1943 in what proved to be part of a very limited exchange with the Germans of several hundred severely wounded personnel, returning home via Lisbon in May 1943.

#### **Combat and Captivity.**

What follows is drawn largely from family correspondence to and from him, principally from his mother and sister, Joanna or Joey,<sup>22</sup> but also from letters to his mother when he was posted missing.<sup>23</sup> There is, as one might expect, some light on his training and then front line experience of war. Against the Italians, even more poorly equipped and led than the British, the war in the Western Desert was much less demanding than when the German Africa Corps under Rommel arrived. The initial skirmishes were not too unfavourable. Letters home written in May and early in June 1941 spoke of having had some fun and games, including growing a seven-days beard, and that in the last month he had 'gained more experience of danger' (29th May 1941) than in the rest of his life put together. Operation

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22. His older brother, Andrew, was also on military service in the UK. His sister Helen, however, was abroad in the Belgian Congo with her husband, Robbie Harkness, on missionary service.

23. There are three principal groupings; letters from ARD on service and as a POW, 1940-1943; letters from his mother and sister, 1940-1943, some of which never reached him and were returned ('marked POW'), or were returned with his effects in 1942 and others which he brought back on repatriation in 1943, and letters to his mother in 1942 from various correspondents. There are also some miscellaneous newspaper clippings and military documents of him, including his record of service book, in which his religion is noted as 'P.B.'

Brevity outside Tobruk, where there was some success,<sup>24</sup> was to be followed by Operation Battleaxe, a shambles or 'byword for bungling',<sup>25</sup> which was launched on 15 June. Within a few hours his squadron of Matilda tanks was annihilated in a frontal attack on dug-in German 88s, under the able command—ironically—of a Major Bach, in civilian life a pastor from Mannheim. Badly wounded in the leg, he was taken to hospital in Tunisia staffed by Australian doctors under Italian supervision. Three months later a hospital ship<sup>26</sup> took him from Benghazi to Italy to an *Ospedale Militare* at Caserta, near Naples, where he was to remain for some months before moving to Parma. There he remained for about a year before shifting immediately prior to repatriation to Lucca; his last card from captivity before movement came on 3rd April 1943.<sup>27</sup> These letters and cards are full of detail about a POW's life, of how the time was filled with games such as Monopoly and Bridge, a haggis night and guising, in learning Italian, in lectures, and—doubtless with an eye to his mother's concerns—church services and his own Bible reading.<sup>28</sup> What clearly helped to break the monotony was the arrival of mail; not until early November 1941, by which time he had been a prisoner for nearly five months did letters start to arrive.<sup>29</sup> Thereafter there was a stream of correspondence from family and friends, not necessarily

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24. This is based on the Regimental History of the 4th and 7th RTR

25. This phrase is taken from *Official History of the Royal Tank Regiment*, 'War in the Western Desert', cited by Robin Newlands, *Eighth Army*, (London: Murray, 2004), p.73. My father spoke seldom of the war except with dismay at the orders from above which insisted on this frontal assault, from senior officers who thought still in terms of a cavalry charge.

26. Letter of 12 October 1941: 'I had a very fine trip across here on a hospital ship.. The food and treatment on the ship were excellent. We get well fed and also paid by the Italian government which enables us to buy little necessities.'

27. On repatriation, see Appendix One below.

28. *The Times* in 1943 carried an article by an American prisoner on a POW camp in Italy under the heading 'British Prisoners run their own University'.

29. 'Cheers. This has been a grand week I received your letters of 23rd and 30th September and 14 October... It is great to know definitely that you are all well and getting my letters.'

on a predictably regular basis. Letters to him took anything between four weeks and three months. In September 1942 Ross observed that in the ten months since he had started receiving letters, he had had 170 of which eighty were from ‘you two’ i.e. his mother and sister. Parcels—clothing, books and food—were valued, as were cigarettes, for personal use and trading. Their delivery was very unsteady,<sup>30</sup> and some of the parcels were riffled, but at least he and other British prisoners did get comforts; the Australasians by contrast received very little from home.

Both the letters to him that have survived and his responses, throw light on family and assembly life during his service and then captivity. Prior to his becoming a POW, the letters from home were more explicit as to how things were with them. To some extent, life went on: there were no longer trips to the seaside, with the east-coast beaches out of bounds, but there were seaside outings to the Clyde coastal resort of Largs and the spa town of Crieff in Perthshire, and breaks away with meeting friends and family in Northumberland. But Edinburgh did not escape unscathed: the windows of Walter Pryde, his brother-in-law—married to Jessie—were blown in, and there were many nights of alert. On 14 March 1941, his mother wrote that that ‘we had a dreadful time last night. Waves of Jerries passing over [the Clydebank Blitz] and guns going. Jessie and the children were in their shelter 9¼ hours’. Joey in a card dated 22 June 1941 (and which he never received, it being returned to her ‘addressee reported wounded and prisoner of war’) did say that ‘Things are moving a bit now with the entrance of Russia into the fray.’ But clearly what could be said by or to him while he was a POW was restricted by censorship and inevitably news of the family and the meeting and the wider circle helped to fill the gap. It was not always good news; his cousin Lex was killed in 1942 in a training accident, and Lex’s younger brother Eric, in Bomber Command was interned in Southern Ireland after his aircraft crashed there.<sup>31</sup> Ross’s response was that he was both sorry

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30. A Mrs Wyatt wrote to Mrs Durie on April 23, 1941 that ‘the parcel situation seems very bad; we can only hope that it will improve’.

31. He was held at the Curragh outside Dublin for a year and then escaped to Belfast reportedly in a coffin before returning to Bomber Command.

and glad for Aunt Annie's sake to hear of Eric's internment; another loss to that family would have been too hard. The worst news for him, however, was the sudden death of his mother in her sleep early in September 1942 at Battlebridge in Northumberland at the age only of 62. He was permitted to respond to his sister's letter which broke the news in a cable; 'Jessie's letter received. His will be done'.

### Home News

Assembly news was a constant, who was speaking where, and with what numbers present. On Sunday 28 March 1940 Mrs Durie included in her letter that they had had 'a lovely tea & three speakers, no sirens and no disturbances of any kind: a packed hall and good sermons by Mr Rod MacC[allum], Mr Hole and U[n]cle David [Ross].' On 1 December 1940 she was heartened by 'a lovely meeting this am [at the OSH] & big crowds out. Walter [Pryde, her son-in-law] is preaching somewhere in the country. Uncle David is speaking tonight.' On 12 January 1940 Joey had just heard Mr Houston: he 'was very good'. Not all speakers were as enthusiastically endorsed; one was allowed to 'have excellent matter, but he jumps and twitches which rather takes away the effect.' The impression given is of things going on at the meeting almost as normal,<sup>32</sup> and some aspects were doing well. Joey reported in March 1941 that there were about 150 at the YPM when Roddy MacCallum, F.B. Hole and Uncle David had spoken. The YPM had a significant social role: the après-YPM could include skating as it did for Joey with her cousin Barbara Ross and Peter Gibb: 'good fun'. Wartime brought some additional responsibilities; a soldiers' meeting and hospitality for young men in the forces who were in Edinburgh. Joey reported to Ross in February

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32. Cf. Robert B Carter, *The Army and I. An account of life in the Army as a noncombatant Christian during the Second World War* (Waterlooville, Hampshire, 2005). Also Ian L.S. Balfour, *Revival in Rose Street. Charlotte Baptist Chapel, 1808-2008* (Edinburgh, 2007), chapters 34 and 35, deal with the ministry of that large Edinburgh Church during the war years, including SS work, outreach, and contacts with the services: there was for example, a Forces Fellowship Meeting, (p. 264).

1940 that their relatives at Polwarth had taken over from them the duty of entertaining the Services, and that they had had for supper on Sunday Ian Hunter (from Wooler, Northumberland) and a wireless operator from a minesweeper. There was news of special occasions: the Sunday School treat at the end of February 1941 attracted 225 children, which must have crammed the Hall to its limits. Who was where was also news: Mrs. Durie worried in February 1941 that several of the youngsters in the meeting would be called up soon ('They are so young')—Peter Gibb, Ian Gunn-Russell and Grant McIntosh—but wondered whether they would get away because they were medical students. The shortage of young men was a growing problem, and the same names as speakers tended to recur more frequently, perhaps. There were some pluses; while Dr Neil Shepherd (a leading light post-war in the Manchester meeting) of the RAMC was in Edinburgh he was pressed into preaching at the OSH and 'also to the soldiers at New Gallery with Uncle David'. But the Sunday School picnic in June 1941 was short of its usual life. 'We have just got back from the picnic at Colinton [a suburban village incorporated into Edinburgh]' wrote Mrs. Durie 'and oh how we missed you young men'. Joey endorsed this: 'a pretty feeble S.S. picnic, owing no doubt to the absence of the 'old crowd'. The races were very poorly organised by comparison'.

Among the family papers are a very interesting group of letters which were sent to Ross Durie's mother when he was posted missing in action. A telegram was received by her from the War Office on the 28th of June 1941. The news spread quickly by phone and telegram and letters poured in to Mrs. Durie at 19 Lockharton Gardens, the family home. What people could say, beyond the assurance of their love, their sympathy and prayers, and the hope that he might yet turn up as a prisoner, it is difficult to see. And a few clearly found the task daunting. Mary Harkness from Amerside Law in Northumbria, after inviting Mrs. Durie to stay with her, quickly moved to a description of the Sunday School treat held the day before; 'there were between 60 and 70,' with a very good speaker. Most cited appropriate scriptural verses as did David Ross whose letter of comfort was one of the first received. There were many other letters received from

people in the OSH and other meetings e.g. the Bookless family of Newcastle. One was from the Mawsons of Bradford, whose son Raymond had been taken prisoner in Crete (and who was to remain a POW right until the end of the war). Friends and family, colleagues and acquaintances wrote or phoned. What people found hardest was the lack of certainty; if dead—the generally unspoken thought—was that he was with Christ, but everyone hoped that he might yet turn up as a prisoner. ‘Poor Ross, he won’t like it as a prisoner, but perhaps it won’t be for long. Lots of people are hopeful of the war finishing soon’, wrote a clearly distressed Meg Mather, a close family friend and a sister, later matron, of Chalmers Hospital in Edinburgh. But as Isa Gunn-Russell put it, ‘the suspense must be terrible for you’. Two of the writers referred to their own experience of waiting for news, one way or another; Flora Fullerton, a schoolteacher, said that

it brings back the memory of a telegram we received just twenty five years ago saying our brother was missing. I remember yet the deep sorrow caused and the blow when it came home to ourselves and the anxiety we passed through until we were certain that he had gone down.

And there was another from Annie Vernon from London:

How well I seem to understand what you are going through these days for ‘Missing’ was the report we had first of my brother on the Somme in 1916 & the strain and anxiety of the weeks that followed before definite news reached us, especially for my dear Mother, I shall never forget.

The community of family and meeting had cared, and had showed it. But there then followed an anxious eight weeks till a letter and card turned up from Ross, confirming that he was a prisoner of the Italians. The good news travelled round Edinburgh and further afield as fast as the bad, and once again letters flowed in. The news was greeted ‘with a glad shout’ in more than one household. ‘What a joy it must have been to you to see his handwriting’ wrote the Darrahs of the Southport meeting. ‘I know you will still feel very anxious... not too tired?’ asked Mrs Bookless of Newcastle. What also followed were letters from some parents whose sons were missing in the same action, and who hoped for news, any news. Ross in a letter from

Caserta (14 December 1941) did send news of the death of one of his men who had died from wounds in Derma hospital that autumn with a request that the family contact his parents in Edinburgh at Springvalley, close to the meeting hall. That was done, although with some difficulty and the parents traced to Stirling. They acknowledged their thanks; though it was not good news it was definite, putting their minds at rest (S. Mochrie, 2 February 1942). There was a follow up letter from a girl who simply introduced herself as 'George Mochrie's friend' and who merely wanted to say how very much appreciated all the trouble that had been taken by Mrs Durie. 'We received so many conflicting reports from the War Office that I, very stupidly I'm afraid, hoped that it all might be a mistake and he might also be a prisoner of war. It's a comforting thought to know that your son was near him in hospital when he died' (Mary Slimnon, 3 Feb 1942).

### **The Legacy of War**

It is impossible to establish how many Glanton Brethren did serve, or indeed did not serve through exemption in a reserved occupation or as a CO. There are no rolls of honour, or plaques listed those who gave their lives for either World War I or World War II, as far as I am aware, in any Glanton place of meeting. Ross Durie returned in 1943, as did others in 1945 from military service. Some, sadly, did not, as was the case with Lex Ross. Ernest Lyon lost not one but two sons: Russell Lyon, a RAF pilot was killed in 1944,<sup>33</sup> and his brother died in a gun accident rather than enemy action in North Africa. It may have been the latter that Ross Durie was referring to (31 December 1942), 'what a tragic end of a clever young chap was Finlay's death.'<sup>34</sup> How active they were in the OSH and its related circles is not known.

How far the assemblies may have been weakened during the War by absence and afterwards by loss is then difficult to assess. But the

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33. The Lyon family lived in Colinton, Edinburgh, and the boys went to the same school, George Watson's in Myreside, as the Ross boys.

34. The letter adds 'There will be a tremendous number of widows and fatherless children before this is over.'



legacy, it would seem, was not good. Clearly the assemblies' work during the War was carried by an ageing leadership, and in the longer run, the war contributed to a haemorrhage in what should have been the generation to succeed. There was the 'gain' of Daniel Patterson, reportedly converted on the beaches at Dunkirk, and who became a conscientious objector, spending part of the War in Durham jail,<sup>35</sup> but some who had been away, never came back to the meetings that they had left, or did so only perfunctorily, as was the case with Ross Durie. Some might have drifted away regardless of the War. For a few, it may have been a result of the way in which war had shaken their faith, for others it could just have been their experience of a world outside the close-knit community of the meeting. A very significant factor, however, in a number of cases was that they had during the war married outside the Brethren. These wives found it difficult to fit into what was a very different and extraordinarily conservative lifestyle, let alone come to terms with Brethren views of what women could and could not do. For some of the men, the choice became one of marriage or meeting, and mostly the meeting lost. In this the OSH was not alone, nor indeed were the Glanton meetings.

### **Appendix 1 Repatriation**

Given the way in which every aspect of the history of the Second World War has been examined and re-examined, it is surprising to find how little directly there is on the exchanges of wounded prisoners which took place in 1943 and 1944, a process which was unique to the war in the West. There were no exchanges on the Eastern front although attempts were made by the Germans to use Stalin's son as a bargaining chip, and none whatsoever with Japan. Helpful however on the context is David Rolf's book, *Prisoners of*

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35. Information from GAC. Patterson was a CO, a lawyer by initial qualification who subsequently retrained at a doctor. He was a controversial figure within Glanton circles.

*the Reich: Germany's Captives 1939-1945* (London, 1988). There was provision under the Geneva Convention for combatants to exchange severely wounded and disabled prisoners. But it was a complicated affair as to who was chosen, and how the actual logistics were to be arranged. An agreement in October 1941 collapsed at the last moment when over 1,100 British POWs had been gathered in France; they had to be disbursed back to their camps. A Medical Commission visited the Military Hospital at Parma, and Ross Durie was one of those identified as 'passed for repatriation'. But all those selected were careful not to build their hopes, or those of their families too high: 'please do not discuss repatriation at home as all the chaps here do not want the news sent home in case it breaks down' (letter of September 1942). Time went by, and the prospect appeared to be receding. Some recovered prisoners were sent to standard camps in mid-December, but not Ross and the others on the list for repatriation; 'none of us repats is to go, so we are hoping there is still a faint chance of repatriation taking place in the near future, i.e. the next six months'. In January 1943 came the promise of a move to a repatriation camp: 'everyone here is happy over this new development. Unfortunately the chaps we leave behind are feeling it pretty keenly'. Showing that the scheme was quite advanced, he added that, 'we understand that the Colonials are going home to Middle East whereas we are coming by Lisbon' (letter of 4 January 1943). The repats moved to Parma in March and their numbers during April were swollen by other personnel on the list, exchange got under way in the second week of April (940 British for 4,370 Italians according to a statement made in the House of Commons on 11 May 1943). The repats were taken by train through Northern Italy, Vichy France and Spain to Lisbon, arriving there to a warm welcome from the local British community.

En route their train had been sheltered in a tunnel while the RAF was mounting a heavy bombing raid on Spezia (*The Times* 17 April 1943). My father said that the Italian officer in charge, from the south and no supporter of Mussolini, commented grimly, "Good these northern so-and-sos are getting it." They travelled onwards by the hospital ship, HMHS *Newfoundland*, arriving in a west of England

port on the 23rd of April where he, and others were allowed to send a telegram to announce their safe arrival back. His Service Book says his status as a POW came to an end on 22 April 1943. A senior medical officer—a surgeon—who had been repatriated with him later wrote (letter of 13 November 1943), offering to have a shot at fixing up his leg. This surgeon, whose name is not known as the second page of the letter is missing, was involved in a subsequent exchange, this time of British repats with the Germans. ‘I went over to Sweden as O.C. corps and brought them back and I loved the job. I certainly had a busy time. We had 2000 on board and how well I know how they were feeling’.

Ross Durie returned in May 1943 to the UK, and after a period of recuperation in Edinburgh and Northumberland, spent the rest of the war in London at the War Office on administrative duties. He was demobilised with the rank of Major in late 1945 and returned to Edinburgh to his law practice at Sturrock & Armstrong, which his friend and partner James Armstrong had kept going. He came back to the family home at 19 Lockharton Gardens which had been settled on him as part of his share of his mother’s estate. Though he ceased to attend the meeting, he continued to act for the assembly in legal matters, as in 1961 when the assembly purchased the Hall from Dr Ronald Ross. It had been gifted to him in 1946 by his father Alec Ross when the owners who had previously rented the hall to the Brethren decided to sell.