



ONE of the most successful BBC television and radio series produced in the 1960s was 'Dr Finlay's Casebook', which was based on stories written by A.J.Cronin, who was born in Cardross and spent part of his childhood in Helensburgh.

Dr Archibald Joseph Cronin was born at Rosebank, a cottage just outside and to the west of Cardross, on July 19 1896.

His father, margarine agent Patrick Cronin, was an Irish Catholic whose parents owned a public house in Bridge Street, Alexandria. His mother, Jessie, was the daughter of a staunch Presbyterian, Archibald Montgomerie, who owned a hat shop at 145 High Street, Dumbarton.

A 'mixed marriage' such as this across the religious divide was highly unusual in those days and children born of such a marriage often had a difficult childhood. Archibald, the only child of the marriage, was no exception.

His parents moved to Helensburgh and set up home at 7 Prince Albert Terrace. He attended Grant Street School, known as the Ragged School because many of its pupils were the children of poor Irish immigrants who had come to Scotland to escape the dire economic situation in their homeland.

He hated these schooldays and desperately longed to mix with the children of the better-off Presbyterian community, but because of his background he was not accepted. He became a lonely and unhappy child.

His father died young, and so he and his mother left Helensburgh and she went to live with her parents in Dumbarton. However initially his grandparents refused to allow young Archibald to live under their roof, and he was sent to live with relations of his father.

After a change of heart his grandparents eventually allowed him to live in their home with his mother, but no love was shown to the boy and he had to cope with being transferred from the strong Catholic influence of his father's relations into the staunch Presbyterianism of his mother's family.



Jessie Cronin herself was a remarkable woman. Firstly, it had been courageous of her to embark on a marriage across the religious divide. Secondly, she later became the first female

public health visitor employed by Glasgow Corporation, an achievement at a time when women were expected to remain in the home.

Archibald's grandparents made it possible for him to attend Dumbarton Academy, despite continuing to show little affection.

At his new school he quickly became a star pupil, as well as being a good athlete and footballer. However his fellow pupils gave him the nickname 'The Wee Pope' and he thoroughly disliked this.

After leaving school he became a medical student at the University of Glasgow, but before he could complete his studies he had a period of war service as a Surgeon Sub-Lieutenant in the Royal Navy, serving aboard a destroyer.

He finally graduated with honours in 1919, thus repaying his mother for her years of sacrifice.

He worked in South Wales, at least one medical practice in Scotland, at Bellahouston and Lightburn Hospitals in Glasgow, and as an HM Inspector of Mines.

When he was 25 and working at Lightburn Hospital in Shettleston, he married a fellow medical graduate, Agnes Mary Gibson, known as May, of Cadzow Lodge, Hamilton, at St Enoch's Station Hotel in Glasgow, and they had three sons.

