

Gareloch Prisoner of War Camps

Written by Donald Fullarton - Last Updated Sunday, 01 June 2014 14:08



THREE prisoner-of-war camps on Garelochside were an important feature of life in Helensburgh and Garelochside during World War Two.

Camp no.582 was at Blairvadach, more or less on the site of the existing outdoor centre but south of the existing road — although it was north of the original shore road. Not far away was another camp at Stuckenduff, and there was a third at Whistlefield.

Garelochhead resident Mrs Fiona Hamilton remembers the Blairvadach camp well, and

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confirms that it was classed as a work camp for the German servicemen.

She says: "The prisoners were sent out to farms, gardens and various other work places as there was a shortage of workers as the men had been recruited into our own services.

"I knew this camp well, as my father was gardener at the Eda Yarrow Home just along the road.

"Stuckenduff camp, now the site of a large housing estate, on the other hand was made up of professional class prisoners, mainly former businessmen — one was, I believe, the editor of a leading Berlin newspaper.

"They worshipped regularly with us at Shandon Church, and at Christmas in the years they were at the camp they made beautiful toys of all descriptions for our Sunday School childrens parties. They also took on the role of Father Christmas, and helped to entertain the children.

"They had a wonderful choir which sang in Shandon and various churches in Helensburgh where concerts were held for funds for the various war effort appeals. To hear 'Silent Night' sung in German was a very emotional experience.

"There was one local marriage, and this prisoner remained here and was, if memory serves me correctly, eventually a management team member of either Polaroid or Westclox in the Vale of Leven."

Mrs Hamilton says that there were other work camps, one at the top of Glen Fruin at the Garelochhead end, and another at Whistlefield. When the Blairvadach prisoners were eventually repatriated to Germany that camp then housed Italian POWs until the end of the war in the Far East.

"They, however, were not allowed out of camp, although some of the Italian business families were allowed to visit them at the fences," she recalls.

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The 40 Blairvadach Nissen huts then became temporary accommodation while new housing was built in Rhu, Garelochhead and Cardross.

She added: "Some of the Germans kept in touch with local families whom they had been friends with for some time, but gradually through time, contact was lost."

Shandon resident Mrs Elinor Grummitt has vivid memories of the Stuckenduff camp, some similar to Mrs Hamilton's. As a child she lived on the estate of Shandon House where she was born.

"My mother used to take me to Stuckenduff Farm to buy eggs, and we had to pass the camp," she says. "I always felt a bit apprehensive at the sight of the German POWs in their brown trousers and tunics with the letters POW on the back — but on reflection they probably did not pose any threat to local people.

"In fact they seemed to become part of the community, as I remember one Christmas in particular when they were escorted along to Shandon Church for the Christmas service. When 'Silent Night' was sung, one POW I could see had tears running down his cheeks. And I am sure he wasn't the only one.

"They also made a wonderful gesture, to the delight of the children of Shandon Sunday School, by presenting to us at our Christmas party toys which they had made from driftwood collected from the beach. Each boy received a wooden hobby horse, and each girl a doll's rocking cradle.

"The toys were beautifully made and brightly painted, and gave us endless hours of enjoyment. I do believe one or two of the POWs actually stayed on in the locality after the war. I can't confirm it, but one, I believe, worked at Stuckenduff Farm."

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