

A Mosaic of Wartime Alyth

Script used by members of the Friends of Perth & Kinross Council Archive at the presentation in the Ogilvy Rooms, Alyth, 5 June 2008

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Presented by:

Margaret Borland-Stroyan, narrator

John Howat, various characters

Christine Wood, various characters

MBS:

During the Second World War, Alyth Town Council met monthly, with the occasional special meeting, to deal with routine administrative matters, such as housing, maintenance of public spaces and finance, and a huge number of circulars from Central Government concerning the War. The extra work was made more difficult by staff shortages. Unless they were in reserved occupations, such as mining or the police, all men and unmarried women of fighting age were liable for military service.

The Council was, perhaps understandably, particularly concerned at the threatened call-up of two of its staff - the Depute Town Clerk, Mr Anderson, and the Town Chamberlain, Mr Shepherd. At its meeting in July 1940, the Council considered that both men were indispensable. It then successfully negotiated the postponement of the Depute Town Chamberlain's call-up until at least 2 April 1941.

This kind of Council business runs through all the records of the burgh, and at times there are papers which have a very personal flavour - as we learn from a letter of March 1941 from that same Mr Shepherd, written to W Ritchie Smith Esq., Town Clerk, Alyth.

John:

Kindly convey my warmest thanks to the Town Council and Officials for the very handsome gifts they have given me on the occasion of my marriage.

It was a very kind thought of the Council and it is greatly appreciated by Miss Wighton and myself.

MBS:

In the letter, Miss Wighton has been crossed out and replaced by Mrs Shepherd! After Mr Shepherd's delayed call-up, Mr Harvey Ferguson was appointed Depute Town Chamberlain on 8 August 1941.

Other Council posts also often attracted a lot of interested applicants and in the days before job application forms were widespread, writing a letter was the norm. When the Council advertised for the job of Assistant Scavenger in July 1940, it received several letters of application. For example:

John:

I hereby make application for the post of assistant in the cleansing department as advertised in Alyth Gazette. I am 44 years of age and married and have been in Alyth and district practically all my days, and am well acquainted with the town. Originally I was a ploughman but have been for the past 5 years with Howie & Co Builders as a labourer. I am strong & fit and would do my very utmost to carry out the duties of the post in a satisfactory manner to the Council and the ratepayers. I would refer you as to my character etc. to Mr D J R Bell, Balloch; and to my present employers Messers Howie & Co

MBS:

Another example:

John:

Sir, re your advert in the local paper for assistant scavenger. I am at present employed by the Town Council as foreman in the works department. Owing to the stoppage of the housing etc for the duration, and all council work about finished I feel it is my duty to apply for the post. I have been employed by the

council for over two years having during that time supervised the new water track digging also the laying of drainage & grounds at Parkside Road, also. Smaller jobs to the satisfaction of the conveners concerned. I am 35 years of age strong fit and healthy. Therefore should the council favour my application I will serve them to the best of my ability.

MBS:

A much briefer application was:

John:

I, S. H., apply for the job as Assistant Scavenger as advertised. I am 43 years of age. Total Abstainer. For further references apply T. Howie & Co.

MBS:

And this one got the job!

MBS:

While some men stayed at home, the vast majority went on active service overseas. Alyth may have been geographically distant from the main arenas of the Second World War, but this did not prevent a large number of servicemen from Alyth being reported missing or dead. The Second World War memorial in Alyth records the names of 5 Royal Navy, 4 Merchant Navy, 17 Army, 6 RAF and 1 WAAF personnel. Although there is no mention on the War Memorial of the Polish Allied Troops, a locally resident Polish war widow, Mrs Szust, received the same letter of condolence on the death of her husband as the British war widows. Council minutes of the meeting held in July 1940 record:

Christine:

War Casualties: Provost Morrison referred to the casualties officially reported of men on service, who had fallen in the War, either resident or related to members of the community resident in the Burgh, and also to the larger number officially posted as missing. On his suggestion, it was agreed to send letters expressing the sympathy of the Council, in the latter case also expressing the hope that the men would yet turn up.

MBS:

Within two months, 13 letters had been written to "relatives of men amissing". Just occasionally, it is possible to trace the history of personal tragedy. For example, we have the correspondence between the Town Clerk and an Alyth lady in 1942.

Letter from Town Clerk of 10 March 1942 to Mrs Mac:

John:

My Council regrets to hear that your husband has been officially listed as missing by the War Office.

In this time of suspense the Town Council as well as the community of Alyth whom the Council represents, desires to be associated with you in your deep anxiety. Amid the confusion and uncertainties of active service in this War it is possible to hope that your husband may still be traced, and so my Council trusts that better news may yet reach you.

Provost Morrison at the Meeting last night expressed the sympathy of the members with you, and the members asked me to communicate this to you while you wait for more definite information regarding your husband.

MBS: In reply...

Christine:

Your letter of 10th March has reached me and I write to thank you, Provost Morrison and each member of Alyth Town Council most sincerely for such a kind thought.

I am, of course, only one among so many who are suffering the same sorrow and anxiety, but the sympathy expressed in your letter helps materially to sustain my courage and hope.

I can say no more except to thank you all again and to ask if you would please let Provost Morrison and all Members of the Town Council know how greatly I

appreciate their sympathy which you have conveyed to me in such kind & helpful terms.

MBS:

Just under seven months later, another letter was sent to Mrs Mac:

John:

It is with great regret that my Council learns that you have received from the War Office official intimation of the death on active service of your husband.

Provost Morrison referred at the meeting of the Council this week in sympathetic terms to your great loss, and, unanimously, the members of the Council desired to express to you their sympathy in your sorry and irreparable loss. Mingled with their sympathy these members, and the community of Alyth whom they represent, are proud to commemorate one who, at the call of King and Country, left all that was dear to him and ventured his life, even to death, in order that his fellow citizens might pursue their lives in freedom, truth and peace.

His name and self-sacrifice will not be forgotten.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

On behalf of and as authorised by the Alyth Town Council,

Town Clerk

Christine:

The very kind letter which you have sent me on behalf of Alyth Town Council has touched me deeply and given me great comfort and I write to let you know how much I appreciate such a spontaneous and kindly expression of sympathy.

In one way I must consider myself lucky as I have my little boy and so many kind and understanding friends – such factors will, I hope, enable me to carry on. It will always be a gratification to me to know that my husband was a good man and a good soldier who was held in esteem and affection by all who knew him.

You will understand the difficulty I have in expressing my thoughts and I would just ask you to convey to the Council my grateful thanks for their kindly and helpful sympathy.

MBS:

Now, some of you will remember, or remember hearing about, the influx of evacuee children, both from Dundee and Glasgow, into Alyth, and the stationing of British and Polish troops within the parish. All these strangers had to be accommodated, made welcome and entertained. From the burgh archive we learn of Sunday cinema shows for the Polish troops, Christmas parties for the children, and dances with reduced admission charges for all military personnel.

However, the Council minutes reflect little enthusiasm for receiving child evacuees from Glasgow and elsewhere. Children from an urban background were seen to be very different from country children, and there were other cultural differences which today, if noticed, would be welcomed as a challenge rather than shunned as a problem.

The Town Clerk wrote to The Secretary, Department of Health for Scotland in April 1940:

John:

Government Evacuation Scheme: 1940 Arrangements

Your circular letter of 20th March with accompanying statement was submitted to a meeting of my Council held on Monday last. I was requested to convey to you the unanimous request of my Council that the children from St Paul's School, Whiteinch, Glasgow, being Roman Catholic children, should not be evacuated to a predominantly Protestant town as ours is here. It would not add at all to the wellbeing of the children that they should be sent, in the circumstances mentioned, to householders here. It was suggested, however, that as there is remaining here a number of children from Shettleston School, the children under

the new Scheme should be sent from that school should the emergency arise. I trust that you will be able to give effect to this suggestion.

MBS:

This request was eventually turned down. Meantime, the Alyth Town Council was pointing out the practical difficulties of billeting evacuee children. At its Special Meeting in April 1940, the Council unanimously adopted a motion, based on one prepared by Blairgowrie Council:

Christine:

That this Council believe that the billeting of evacuee children upon householders in Perthshire imposed unnecessary hardship, as an alternative solution is available in the County by the requisitioning of a large number of mansion houses to be found both inside and outwith burghs in the County and which are for the greater part of the year, or altogether, unoccupied, and suggest that they be utilised as complete school units, at any rate in the landward part. Further, that the Council approach the Government and lay before them this suggestion as an extension to, and improvement upon, the Government Scheme.

MBS:

Some weeks later, the Town Clerk wrote to The Secretary, Department of Health for Scotland, Edinburgh:

John:

Government Evacuation Scheme. Hostels

I refer to your letter of 15th. It is proposed to establish hostels in Alyth for children to be received under the new scheme, and for the following reasons:-

1. Alyth is a small country town 17 miles distant from Dundee. There are in the burgh a large number of retired and elderly householders many of whom are physically unable to care for children. When the survey was undertaken in January 1939, many of these elderly people expressed their willingness to take evacuees, and did receive them when evacuation took place. After two or three weeks, in almost every case they had to be relieved of their obligation, as they found themselves unable to look after children.

2. Alyth being in a raspberry and potato growing district, a large number of women are normally employed on the land. Since the outbreak of war and the consequent scarcity of agricultural labour, many more women are now so employed. The potato planting season has just finished, women will shortly be at the haymaking, then in succession at the raspberry picking, the harvest, the potato lifting, and through the winter at potato dressing. It will thus be seen that many women will be steadily employed throughout the year, and will be unable to receive evacuees.
3. Some of the householders in the large houses in the Burgh normally let furnished rooms to holiday makers during the Summer. While there may or may not be as many holiday-makers as in peacetime, there is at present a considerable demand for furnished houses and rooms from people living in vulnerable areas near the east coast.

The establishment of hostels is thus necessary for the effective administration of the evacuation scheme in this Burgh.

The hostels proposed to be established are for the purpose of accommodating

- (a) children unsuitable for ordinary billeting;
- (b) normal children for whom billets cannot be found; and
- (c) normal children while changes of billets are being arranged or where householder requires temporary relief.

Barony HallIt is proposed to ask the Headmaster of St. Paul's School, Whiteinch, Glasgow, from which the children are to be sent, to arrange for Nuns and other personnel to staff the hostel. Any kitchen and house maids required might be obtained locally at the usual rates of wages, if not obtained from Glasgow.

The children would be educated along with the other evacuee children in the Burgh, at the Barony Church Halls which were used for that purpose for a considerable period during the first evacuation.

MBS:

The Council and the Department of Health for Scotland agreed to accommodate 40 evacuee children in Barony Hall and to billet 200 on private households.

Often the children were accompanied by their mothers, but many came alone. Young children away from home are often unsettled, or even badly-behaved, and those in Alyth were no exception. But bad, or thoughtless, behaviour was not confined to children, as this extract from a letter in April 1941 from the Depute Town Clerk to The Secretary, Department of Health for Scotland, suggests:

John:

Huts at Pitnacree Farm: These premises were used to house 6 mothers and 37 children who could not be billeted elsewhere at the time A considerable quantity of straw and timber which was stacked near the premises, and also a number of raspberry cases were destroyed by the evacuees, having been used by them for firewood. In addition, much damage was done to the premises and neighbouring fencing.

MBS:

In addition, minutes of the Council meeting on 12.4.43. record:

Christine:

It was mentioned that damage had been done by evacuees to the furniture of Mr X estimated at £6. Instructions given to settle up to £5.

MBS:

As the Alyth authorities reported to the Department of Health on 29.4.41, there were also health implications in receiving so many strangers into a small town. For example, a clinic at Meethill Cottage was set up to examine and treat verminous children.

Misunderstandings could occur when the host family was afraid of offending the children's own parents. In November 1940, the Depute Town Clerk wrote to the Evacuation Officer in Glasgow:

John:

Robina S, Glasgow

I duly received your letter of 14th November. And have investigated this matter. Some time ago a daughter of Mrs C with whom this girl was billeted, asked me what the procedure was when an evacuee child required medical attention, and I told her to get her mother to take the child to a Doctor.

I understand she was seen by Dr P, Alyth, who diagnosed impetigo, and the District Nurse informs me that she attended the child 14 times in all during the month of October, the first visit being on 6th October. The Nurse states that Mrs C was reluctant to cut the girl's hair as she was afraid that parents would be angry with her for doing so. Nurse cut the hair and treated the disease. She informs me that the child was well-nourished and looked after and she does not think that any complaint of neglect could be made against Mrs C.

MBS:

The Evacuation Officer replied two days later:

Christine:

I am to thank you for your letter of 23rd November regarding the complaint lodged by the mother of Robina S, recently returned from Alyth suffering from impetigo of the scalp. I have noted that the girl was attended by the district nurse and that a local doctor had seen the child and had diagnosed impetigo. When the mother called here she led me to believe that the child had not been treated and I am very glad to learn that this was not the case.

The mother also indicated that when the child was fit again she would like her to return to the house where she was billeted prior to her being removed and billeted with Mrs C. If she approaches me on this matter, however, I shall communicate with you again.

MBS:

There were other problems, about which the Depute Town Clerk wrote to the Evacuation Officer:

John:

I duly received your letter of 4th December regarding the children Sarah and Elizabeth, billeted with Mrs T, Alyth. I had previously seen Mrs T who strongly denied that the children were not properly fed or cared for. She stated that the children's underwear was washed each week during the summer months and each fortnight since the winter began, and that she herself had knitted stockings for the children. I also saw one of the children billeted with Mrs T, and asked him what he got for his various meals, and from what he told me it did not appear that he was being underfed. I noted however, what Dr S has reported.

I am endeavouring to find other accommodation for these children, but with so many soldiers billeted in the town it is extremely difficult to find accommodation, particularly since householders receive more money for billeting soldiers than for children.

I retain Dr S's account which I shall pay and charge against the Evacuation Account.

MBS:

It would appear that the children's mother then whole-heartedly withdrew her complaint, but, annoyingly, not all the correspondence has survived. We do have the Depute Town Clerk's letter some weeks later to the Evacuation Office:

John:

With reference to my conversation by telephone with your assistant today, I enclose copy sic of a letter dated 28th February, which I have today received from Mrs Mac, Shettleston, regarding her children, Sarah, Walter, and Betty, who are at present billeted with Mrs T, Alyth, and for whom following on correspondence with you, I had obtained other accommodation. The children were to have

removed to their new billet today, but in view of what has transpired, they are to remain with Mrs T meantime.

MBS:

The Council certainly took steps to safeguard all schoolchildren in Alyth from threatened air-raids. It had a trench constructed in the school grounds. It was mainly cut by ex-servicemen, many working on a voluntary basis. The cost of the trench, with sandbag protection, came to £51 17shillings and 1 penny. The Council received little thanks from the County, or, indeed, the Scottish Education Department, for its pains.

Provost Morrison was determined to obtain financial support for the trench, particularly since one of the technical staff in Edinburgh had praised it highly and told Alyth that the Home Office would use the design of this trench as a model for others throughout the country. The Education Committee in Perth was unsympathetic, so Provost Morrison appealed to the Secretary of the Scottish Education Department in Edinburgh in October 1940:

John:

In anticipation of immediate danger from the air in September 1939, my Council constructed a trench in a field at the side of the School here, to accommodate the local children and the children evacuated from Glasgow during air raids.

After the trench had been made, my Council asked the Perthshire County Council to take it over and maintain it. This request was refused on the grounds that no provision throughout Perthshire was being made for protecting school children in air raids, except in the City of Perth. My Council repeated this request a month ago after Mr Hood's visit, and it was again turned down for the same reason.

Throughout the Eastern District of Perthshire great dissatisfaction is now being expressed by members of the general public and the local School Management

committees at the County Council's attitude. I enclose a copy of the Blairgowrie Advertiser reporting a meeting of the Blairgowrie and Alyth School Management committee recently. My Council therefore ask you to press the County Council for some action and, as far as we are concerned, to take over this trench and repay the £40 incurred in its construction, together with the payment of £5 annually, which is the rental of the ground.

There are approximately 480 local children attending the school, and when the Glasgow children were here there were over 300 additional children at school.

I may state that the feeling at the time was one of extreme urgency owing to the general expectation of bombing raids.

MBS:

But, according to the Council minutes of 14 October 1940, this appeal was unsuccessful: the Education Department in Edinburgh insisted that the matter was one for the County Education Committee, while the County Education Committee had repeated that quote "the expense here could not be recognised".

Wartime problems were not, however, limited to conflicts between the Council and other official bodies. Neighbours did not always behave harmoniously either. One lady was so upset by hers that she wrote to the Council in July 1940 to complain about...

Christine:

...the people above, I have stood up to their noise and filthy language and I feel I can stand it no longer ... I try to close the bedroom door as gently as I can, as I would not willingly annoy anyone, but every time it is closed there is a chair or something heavy thrown across the floor, and I am called names he ought to be jailed for, the neighbours here will confirm this ... he is there all day, as he does not believe in working so long as the Labour Exchange will keep him... even when there is an air raid on, if the sirens did not waken you, he would as he gets

up and bounces about cursing and swearing . I am very sorry to have to trouble you with this but it's getting impossible.

MBS:

Another gentleman was concerned by local cats: in April 1940 he complained that they...

John:

...have the nasty habit of scraping and fouling the flower beds belonging to me and other tenants and also the plot in front If all the tenants were to keep cats, Parkside Road would soon become a blue pencil Paradise. You're telling me!"

MBS:

We assume that by blue pencil Paradise he meant Parkside Road would become a total mess – like a heavily-censored document. Or did blue pencil have another, local, meaning?

Dogs were arguably more of a problem than cats because of sheep grazing in the Diamond Jubilee Park. (Grazing, by the way, was charged at an annual rent of £2 10 shillings.) A Council minute for 12 May 1941 records that a "Notice re Dogs etc in Gardens" had been placed in the newspaper, but damage was still being done.

At the same time, the Council asked the Press to note that the plot of grass at Alexandra Street was for younger children, and that the public should be careful to close the Park gates while sheep were being grazed there.

But complaints about the dogs continued. On 9 February 1942 minutes record:

Christine:

Complaints of damage to the gardens had been received. It was agreed to send a letter to each of the tenants, who had dogs, that unless these were carried they would require to be taken out on leash. If complaints continued, the council would enforce the Terms of Let.

MBS:

The Town Clerk duly sent tenants a circular letter in April 1942 warning them that:

John:

At the last two monthly meetings of my Council complaints regarding damage to gardens caused by dogs were considered.... I was instructed to intimate to all their tenants that the tenants' dogs must be kept under control and that if such damage is caused to gardens and garden plots at their houses then the Council would assume that these dogs were not under proper control, in which case my Council would take steps otherwise in terms of the several lets.

It is necessary that the action contemplated by the Council should be communicated to all the Council's tenants, especially in the circumstances of the country just now when food is of essential importance, but I trust that this warning will be sufficient to obviate any action being taken.

MBS:

Other animals were even less popular than straying or noisy pets. The Department of Agriculture for Scotland wrote to Alyth and other Councils on 13 March 1941 enclosing leaflets portraying a rat with a slight moustache and black hair worn Hitler-style. The message?

KILL THAT RAT! IT'S DOING HITLER'S WORK.

The leaflet explains the danger posed by hungry fast-breeding rats to food supplies, urges all citizens to kill every rat they see, and contains recipes for rat poison that are quote "practically harmless to stock".

But the problem of rats was not limited to agricultural buildings. On 4 September 1941 a lady complained to the Council about the state of her house, where ceilings had come down in two rooms and the landing....

Christine:

Can you give me any hope of getting out of this house I or the small children cant sleep, for rats...even now they are running about the room next the stable and in the walls...the upstairs roofs are down and what is left is ready to fall any minute...this last two nights we have all been in the kitchen sitting on the bed and chairs trying to sleep, in fact if the rats had a brass band one would think it was the Poles coming. Mr Smith I don't want to be a bother to anybody but Mr M takes my half-crown each week but will do nothing...even if it was Rattaray or Blair I would go to be rid of the rats...the Baby will not lie in bed now after the fright she got, as you know I've spent a lot of money on it but its useless to try and keep the paper on and I've also spent about 7/6 for Rodine and Mr Chambers gave me 3 times a big box. I'd be very grateful if you could hold out some hope of me getting another house.

MBS:

A Council official had earlier pencilled a note recording his visit to the lady's home:

John:

Mrs F, Mill Street. Ceilings fallen in 2 rooms and landing. Kitchen full of rat holes. One of children took convulsions with rat running over her last night. Can't get sleep. Mrs F. has papered house twice and distempered once. Been in 2 years. Has paid 7/6 for rat poison. Chalmers was through house yesterday. Five children at home. 2 others out working. Has sat in chair with light on through the night for fear of rats. Rent 2/6 per week to C.D.M. Could pay bigger rent.

MBS:

Four days later the Council opted to refer the lady to the Factor of the house and was soon able to record that she had moved to another house and that her old house had already been condemned.

Other Alyth residents were more concerned that their accommodation might attract unwelcome attention from the enemy. A petition bearing 11 signatures arrived in Council offices in July 1940:

Christine:

We the undersigned tenants of the Glebe Crescent Housing Scheme humbly draw the attention of the Town Council to the fact that at present the Housing Scheme by its light colour is a very obvious mark for enemy raiders, and we hereby petition the Council to have the houses painted a darker colour for the duration of the war.

MBS:

But, at its meeting on 12 August, the Council approved a letter refusing the petition.

During the war, railings were removed from private and public buildings for scrap metal, but there were many objections. For example, solicitors MacGregor Mitchell & Co appealed to the Council in December 1941 against the proposed removal of railings in front of Inverenty....

Christine:

As you are aware, the house is opposite a Common, which is frequented by tinkers and hawkers. At present it is occupied as a Polish Hospital, and it would be very undesirable that these gangrel bodies should have unimpeded entry into the garden, and possibly into the house and outhouses.

MBS:

At its meeting on 12 January 1942, the Council recorded that an architect would...

Christine:

...visit the area and decide upon the railings that fall within the category of exemptions.

MBS:

Annoyingly, it is not clear whether the authorities did insist on removing the Inverenty house railings. But we know from the Blairgowrie archives that the Council there employed so many delaying tactics that many railings in Blairgowrie survived the War!

Throughout our reading of the wartime Council minutes and correspondence, we gained the strong impression that there was “a fine friendly feeling” between the Polish soldiers and the people of Alyth. The Council Archive suggests that the Polish troops billeted in Alyth made a considerable effort to be helpful to the local community.

The Town Clerk received a letter dated 9 December 1940 from W. Hlawsa, Major, at Barony Hall, Alyth:

Christine:

I enclose the sum of £16 2s 4d which was paid to my soldiers by local farmers, for one day’s work offered by them; and request you to allocate it, preferably to local charities, as you think best.

MBS:

The Town Clerk replied....

John:

I duly received your favour of 9th December sending the sum of £16 2s 4d being the result of one day’s work offered by your men to local farmers, and which I reported to a meeting of the Town Council held on Monday last. Needless to say, they were most gratified to receive such a handsome contribution from your men through you to the local charities, and I was asked to express warmest thanks for this donation.

May I say that I take this as a token of the fine relationship between the Polish Troops in our town and townspeople.

Later I shall report to you the particular charities among which we have allocated the sums. Would you please convey the terms of this letter to your soldiers?

MBS:

In return, the Council attempted to entertain, and to accord due privacy and security to, the Polish troops. Here are two extracts from the minutes of the meeting on 8 September 1941 :

Christine:

The Chairman explained that the fresh Polish Troops who had come had been informed that the Town Hall could be used by them on Sundays without rent – this arrangement including a Cinema for the Troops by Miss Lawson on behalf of War Charities.

MBS:

And....

Christine:

The Chairman explained that he had allowed a number of the Polish troops to use the Park and Pavilion there temporarily until their own Huts at Loyal were ready for occupation and he suggested that the gates of the Park should be closed, while the troops were there, during black-out – Grieve to be told, and a sentry posted at the gates. All these arrangements were approved of.

MBS:

Further evidence of Alyth's affection for the Polish troops can be found in the Archive in January 1942. When some of the Polish soldiers were involved in a motoring accident, the Council expressed its concern. The Town Clerk wrote to The Officer in Command, Polish Troops, Invernenty, Alyth

John:

At a meeting of my Council held last night reference was made to the unfortunate accident to a number of your men on Sunday last, in which it is understood serious injuries had been caused to some of them. I was requested to express the sympathy of the members to yourself and your corps and to the men themselves involved in the accident. It is appreciated that not only the suffering

occasioned to the men is a matter of concern but also the loss, for a time at any rate, in man-power and in training of personnel.

Perhaps I may be allowed also as President of the local YMCA to conjoin with this expression from the Town Council the sympathy also of the Canteen Workers. Probably quite a number of the injured are known to these workers.

It is left to you to convey the terms of this letter, or not, as you may think best, to the men themselves.

MBS:

Major Sokolowski, Officer Commanding 67th Polish Tank Battalion (67 Batalion Czolgow), replied the following day:

Christine:

I have just received your letter dated the 13th of January, concerning the unfortunate accident to a number of my men on last Sunday, and I thank you very much for the expression of sympathy which I appreciate greatly.

Would you please to transmit my thanks to the members of the Town Council as well as to the Ladies working at the local YMCA-Canteen.

Let me inform you that I ordered your expression of sympathy to be included in the order of the day of my Battalion.

MBS:

Curiously, although the Council Meeting of 12 January 1942 was reported, fairly fully, in the *Alyth Courier*, there is no reference in the newspaper either to the Council's discussion about this or to the accident itself. Were the people of Alyth aware of this incident?

MBS:

If relations between the townspeople and the Allied troops, British or Polish, were cordial, records suggest that the Town Council was less than enthusiastic about having Prisoners of War living close to Alyth.

In April 1942, the Town Clerk wrote to the Ministry of Works about a proposal to establish a POW camp for approximately 650 men in wooden hutments at Balhary:

John:

My Council have no objection to the acquisition of the site at Balhary for a Prisoners of War Camp provided

- (1) that an adequate guard is maintained and
- (2) that the Prisoners are not allowed to visit Alyth, in groups at any rate, without appropriate precautions.

MBS:

Regulations were laid down for the use of the cinema by the POWs. They were able to watch films, but the Council charged the projectionist according to the type of film shown. Council minutes of the meeting in February 1944 record:

Christine:

Prisoners' of War Cinema: The Convenor reported that he had tentatively arranged charges as follows: Propaganda films only no charge. Entertainment and Propaganda Films 10/- plus Hallkeeper's commission half-crown.

But not all the townspeople were happy. The Joint Town Clerk wrote in September 1944 to Mr A C Sim, the Chief Constable of the County, with copies to Colonel Harris, Balhary Camp, Meigle, and to Sir Thomas Hunter, MP, Perth, as follows:

John:

I understand that on the instructions of the County Council you have written to the Home Office on the subject of an earlier curfew for Italian Co-operators in the various camps in the County and also for those billeted out on farms.

The same question has arisen in Alyth in connection with the Italian Co-operators housed at Balhary Camp which is about two miles from Alyth, and those from that camp billeted out in the surrounding district. The matter has become particularly acute since the removal of the additional hour of summer time, and the consequent earlier darkness.

At present both the Co-operators in the Camp and those in billets require to be in at 10 pm. My Council, for the reasons stated below, consider this hour too late and suggest that these men should be in Camp or in their billets for the night at a much earlier hour, say black-out time.

Prior to the recent removal of restrictions the town of Alyth was out-of-bounds for the Italians, and while it was not unusual to see girls and women talking with the men on the roads outside the town, it is only since they have been allowed into the town that the matter has come to a head, and my Council, in view of the apprehension felt by the townspeople, and particularly the parents of girls, have felt called upon to take up the matter.

So far as my Council are aware, no specific complaints against the conduct of any of the men in the town itself have been made, but it is common knowledge that in addition to associating with certain Alyth women, women of disreputable character come regularly from Dundee and Blairgowrie to the vicinity of the camp and also to bothies on farms where men are billeted, and further senior school girls and the younger shop girls have been seen in company with the men.

Beyond the cinema on certain evenings of the week, there is no entertainment in Alyth for these men after dark, and it is understood that there are ample facilities for entertainment and amusement in the Camp. It does not seem that there is any good reason for these men wandering about the streets after dark. It is a fact that both in the Burgh and rural area women are now afraid to venture out

unaccompanied after black-out time, and particularly as there is yet no street lighting in the Burgh.

Accordingly it is more as a preventive measure that my Council urge an earlier curfew hour, as unless this is done, trouble is certain to arise.

I may add that it is understood that the total number of Italian Co-operators at Balhary, including the Billetees, is in the region of 1,500, and that this is much greater than the adult male population of the Burgh.

My Council will be glad if you will as a matter of urgency take up the matter in this letter a copy of which has been sent to the Member of Parliament for the constituency.

MBS:

But restrictions on POW freedom of movement were contrary to Government policy, as the Council learned at its meeting...

Christine:

Italian P O Ws. There was read copy letter from the Parliamentary Private Secretary to the Secretary of State for War sent by Sir Thomas Hunter MP stating that in recognition of Italian Prisoners of War voluntarily assisting in the war effort, certain privileges had been granted them including freedom to exercise within five miles of their camp up to 10pm, and that any complaints against their behaviour should be reported to the Camp Commandant

MBS:

A proposal to reduce the police presence would only make the situation worse...

Christine:

The intention to withdraw Constable Macphee was mentioned, and the Clerk was instructed to press urgently on the Chief Constable that he might be allowed to remain in view of the proximity of the POW Camp and of the large number of Italian Prisoners that came into the town.

MBS:

And the Council learned at its next meeting that the Chief Constable would “endeavour to keep a Constable at Alyth in addition to the Sergeant.”

In spring 1945, the country prepared for Victory in Europe and peace. Arrangements were made for a public service of Solemn Thanksgiving and Commemoration to be held in the High Parish church following the official announcement of Victory in Europe (VE) Day. At the Council meeting on 14 May....

John:

Provost Sim referred to the Great Victory which had been achieved in Europe and paid tribute to the skill and endurance of the fighting services though at a heavy sacrifice. He expressed the hope that the War with Japan would be quickly finished, and sympathy to all those who had suffered loss. He also stated that he was to attend a service at St Giles, Edinburgh, on Wednesday, 16th, when the King and Queen would be present.

MBS:

When war in the Far East ended in August 1945, arrangements were made for celebrations on the two Victory in Japan holidays, held on the 15th and 16th of August, and for a joint Thanksgiving Service to be held in Alyth High Parish Church the following Sunday at 11.15am

Council minutes for the 10th of September record that the Chairman expressed the gratitude of the Council and the community in suitable terms for the victory in the Japanese War. He commented on the relief it would be to any relatives whose menfolk were on Service and also praised the valour of our troops.

During this mosaic of life in Alyth during the Second World War we've raised various questions. We've asked about relations between the townspeople and evacuees from the cities, and we should like your views on relations with Allied troops, especially the Poles, and with the Prisoners of War. We did not come across any specific reference to German POWs. Was there any contact between them and the people of Alyth? We've also asked about the meaning of "blue pencil Paradise" and about possible secrecy over the Polish road accident in January 1942. We should be interested to find out whether the Invernenty railings were ever removed. Where is Invernenty House? When were most of the Alyth men called up for military service? And finally, we have the case of the disappearing map. During the War, the widow of Mr Phillips presented Alyth with his map of the local hills and his research material. The map is reproduced in the Alyth guide book. But does anyone know where the original map and the research material are?

The end