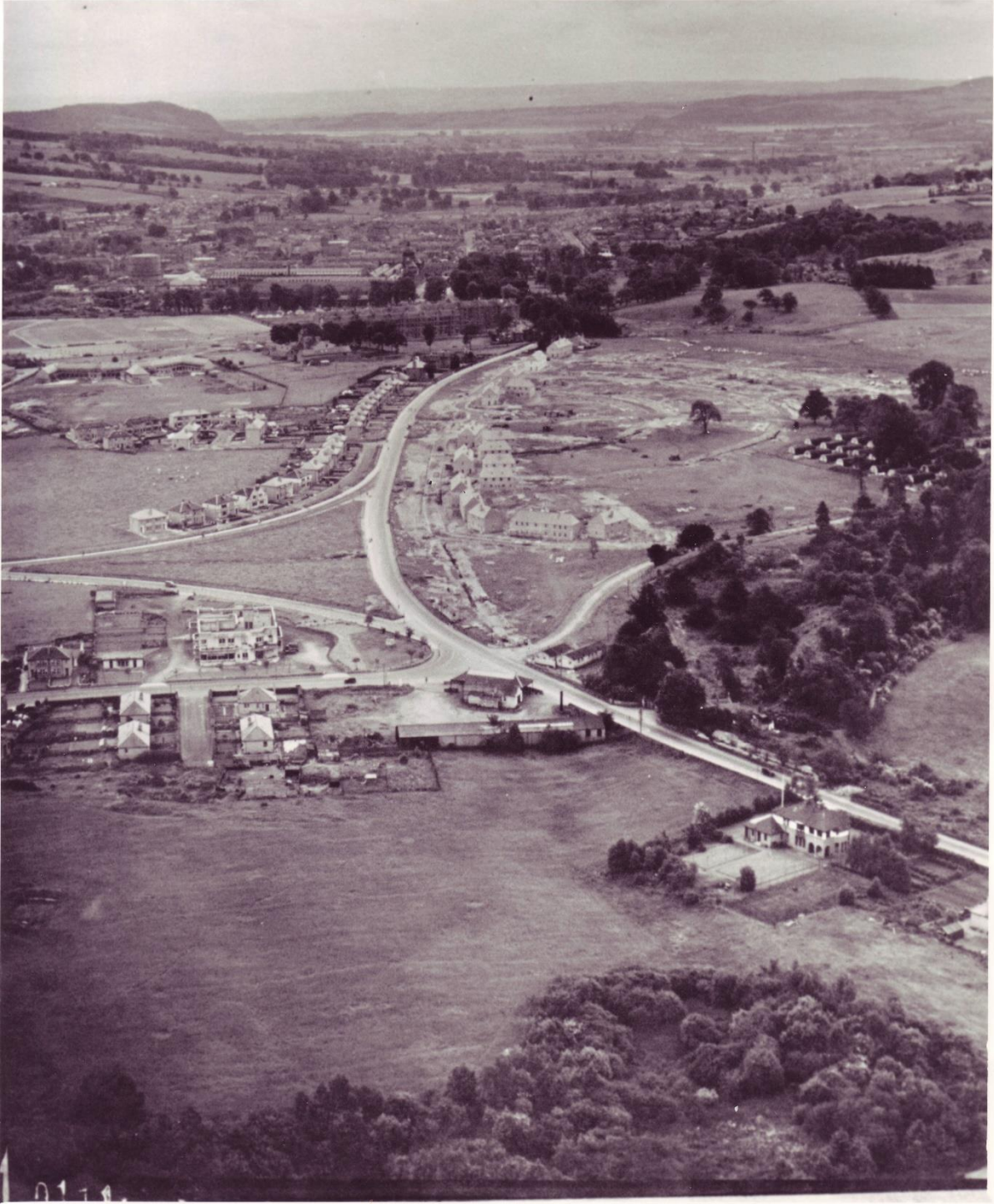


Rosemary Bamforth – Tullichewan Castle

There is an article on the website about Tullichewan Castle's role in World War Two. It was used amongst other things as a camp for the American Seabees (Construction Battalions = CB's) laying a pipeline from the oil terminal at Finnart (which they had also built) to a terminus at Old Kilpatrick. When the Seabees had finished their work, the encampment was almost immediately taken over by the Royal Navy as an induction and training camp for the Women's Royal Naval Service, better known as WRENS.



The Camp Huts are in the middle-right of this aerial photo taken about 1947

Hundreds of young women received their basic training at Tullichewan over the period that it was used by the WRENS. They were all volunteers and typically they joined as soon as they were deemed old enough to join – usually 18 sometimes 17. Equally typically they were middle class who had led what could be called comfortable, sheltered lives – their parents had servants to perform the sort of menial jobs which these young ladies were now required to carry out such as lighting fires, cleaning toilets, making their own beds etc. For many this was much more of a shock than any other aspect of being new recruit. After all, most of them had been at public school and were used to a regimented regime, a point which was made by many in recalling their days at Tullichewan. But very few had any experience of doing basic housework.

All of this was brought to mind by the obituaries last year in the Daily Telegraph and Glasgow Herald of Rosemary Bamforth who died in April 2018 aged 93 and who had done her initial training in the WRENS at Tullichewan. Although she was born in Glasgow in October 1924 as Rosemary Ince, to wealthy middle-class parents, she received anything but a typical Glasgow middle-class upbringing, instead being sent to the quintessentially English boarding school for young ladies – Cheltenham Ladies College. It didn't seem to do her any harm because she applied to study medicine at Glasgow University when she was only 16, but was told to come back when she was a year older. Instead, aged 17 she applied for and was accepted into the WRENS as soon as she was 18.



Rosemary Bamforth in her 20's

The WREN induction centre had been in London but had been moved to Tullichewan because of the German bombing. For Rosemary Ince it was virtually a home posting, but all her other memories of being at the camp coincided with the experiences of her colleagues: emptying dustbins featured prominently. She has another recollection that few of her colleagues have mentioned: "I was aware of being watched and frequently questioned about everything I did". She didn't know it at the time, of course, but she was being assessed for her suitability to work in the Bletchley Park network, Britain's most closely guarded secret of the Second World War – and for 30 years after. Bletchley Park was the country house in Buckinghamshire where British mathematicians, scientists, electrical engineers and military intelligence staff read, decoded and interpreted German's military messages sent by wireless from and received by their Enigma coding / decoding machines. The raw encoded wireless signals were intercepted in a number of outstations in southern England and sent to the enormous decoding machines at Bletchley by what were basically teleprinters.



Bletchley Park

After Tullichewan, Rosemary worked in a number of these outstations sending the captured signals to Bletchley, but she was eventually posted to Hut 11 at Bletchley Park itself. Hut 11 housed the Turing-Welchman Bombe machines which were electro-mechanical devices which calculated the daily settings of the various types of German Enigma machines used by the different branches of the German military. These settings had to be known or the decoding computers could not break the German codes and read the military orders and reports. It was a vital part of the whole code-breaking operation but was known as the “Hell-Hole” to the people who worked there because of the hot, noisy conditions and the very high-pressure under which people were working in the Hut. Without knowing these daily settings for each branch of the German military, German messages could be read, as the Royal Navy and North Atlantic convoys were to discover to their cost when the Germans changed the mechanical settings on their naval Enigma machines and the codes couldn’t be broken for a number of months.

Her work at Bletchley was something she couldn’t talk about for the next 25 years but since she was a woman who lived the whole of her life to the full and went on to make important contributions in other fields, it’s very unlikely that that bothered her very much. After the war she went back to Glasgow and took her medical degree at Glasgow University, was engaged for a time to a fellow doctor who was also an Arctic Explorer, lived and worked in America and specialised in pathology. She married another doctor, John Bamforth, who she met when working at Southampton General hospital. It was also while at Southampton General that she noticed that a number of ship workers were dying of mesothelioma and

went on to deliver a paper suggesting a link between the disease and asbestos exposure on ships, among the first people to spot that link.

Not only was Rosemary a skier, and a cold-water swimmer (no wet suits for her), she took up windsurfing in her 60's and in her 70's she trained as a silversmith, to a high enough standard to register her own hallmark.



Rosemary Bamforth in later years

All-in-all a full and rewarding life in which her time at Tullichewan made a small but memorable impression.