

Things to think about:

- **If you were Mary, how would you have felt when Ali had to go to war?**
- **Do you think that the land on Raasay really belonged to Ali and Mary?**
- **If the war hadn't happened, do you think Ali and Mary would have stayed on Rona?**
- **Apart from the Police and the landowner, most people supported the 'Raasay Raiders', why?**



Learning about WWI

'Coming Home'



Mary MacLeod

**A fictional Account
based upon real events
in Raasay and Rona**

Written and designed by Kerry Duncan

Image: crofter couple, courtesy of Sandy Stevenson

September 1914

I'm Mary MacLeod. I'm 21. I live on a small island called Rona with my husband Alistair and my elderly grandparents. My parents left for Canada 3 years ago with my younger brothers and sisters. The land is rocky and no good for crops. It takes a lot of effort to feed a family. I stayed behind. My Seanmhair and Seanair need care.

Many years ago, both mine and Alistair's families lived on Raasay. My Seanmhair and Seanair say the land was rich and there was food a-plenty. Their parents were cleared to Rona during the Highland Clearances. Life has always been hard here. It's over-crowded and we rely so much on the sea for our food.

The war broke out in August this year. I know there is a lot of fighting going on, but it seems so far away. Our main concern is being warm and having food for us all. Alistair works on Raasay during the week, at the new iron mine. Then he comes home and manages our wee bit of croft. He works hard so we can eat meat once a week and pay our rent to the landowner.

People in our village have been saying that Alistair is young and fit and should go off to fight. I can't let him go though, what would we do?

November 1921

We are all waiting at the Pier. Our men are coming home, the 'Raasay-raiders' as they are now known. It's the happiest day of my life. I have good news to tell my husband, I have a wee bump, a wee Ali or Mary on the way!

A Piper from Portree is waiting here too, he wears his kilt and uniform from the war. We are all dancing a wee jig and laughing. When our men climb ashore, the Piper will march us around Raasay House where all the board men are having a meeting, doubtless sipping from fancy china. The big-wigs, the ones who decide what to do about our land.

Proudly we will march; women, men and children, for this is our home and this will be our victory. For all the lives lost in that god-forsaken war, we, us-who stand here breathing- will fight; and never give up.



June 1916

Alistair is still working at the iron mine. There are now 200 men, Prisoners of War from Germany, Austria and Poland. When they first arrived, the local workers were feared. But Alistair says the men just do their job and don't bother anyone. They are not so different to us. They hate the war too. So many letters are coming home to say local men, sons, brothers and Fathers are lost. Gone forever.

I'm sitting sewing some secret pockets into Ali's trousers. We've been smuggling in some oats for the poor prisoners. They are on basic rations and Ali says he saw one of them faint at work. It's a crying shame. We don't have much, but we are happy to share. Ali came home with a vase one of the men had carved out of bone for us. It's sitting on the mantle.

Army officers came knocking the other day. All men, even married men are now, called up to fight. Our only saving grace is that Ali has to take care of us. We had to get a local girl to write a letter of appeal for us. I can only read a bit and Ali's hand-writing is a scrawl. We've posted it off. Now it's a waiting game.

July 1917

Ali's been gone to war for 11 months. His appeal was rejected. The officer came to his work and took him off to train to fight down in Bedford. I miss him so much. I had to go and take a job in Applecross in a hotel. I've had to leave my Seanmhair and Seanair behind. My friend Isobel is taking care of them and I send money home to her.

I haven't heard from Ali for 6 weeks. The knot in my stomach grows larger every day and I fear it will climb my throat, the tears will start and when will they stop? I busy myself in the evenings knitting socks for the soldiers. It's the only thing I can do.

December 1919

Ali is home from the war, we are back in Rona. He lost his left hand. His face is not the same. There's lines there that were never there before. He sometimes tells me about life in the trenches, the smell of blood, the crying of men in pain and the awful hunger. But it only brings it back. We need to carry on with life. We are the lucky ones...he is alive, at least, but how are we lucky?

September 1921

My Seanmhair and Seanair passed away last year of the dreaded flu. It was a very sad time, but a time for change. We are sick of suffering after Ali's fight for King and Country! So we packed our bags and left Rona for our real home on Raasay.

The iron mine has packed in now, since the war. So the big iron mine man, William Baird, is no longer about. He still owns Raasay. Well, he has a bit of paper that says so! But we belong here!

We built a shelter with the help of the locals, and fenced our bit of croft. We've been growing our food. Poor Ali struggles with his hand gone, but you'd never hear that from him.

Last night my Ali and other men who've settled here were captured by the Police! Who do they think they are taking away our men? This is our land! Our wee bit of country! The men wanted to throw them in the water but John MacLeod, the Bootmaker stopped them. I'm away up to his house the now to see if there's any word about them from Inverness Prison. You see John can read and write. He said he will write to the Prime Minister and the Queen on our behalf. Everyone is angry, everyone is lost without our men, our ex-servicemen! Taken from us again!

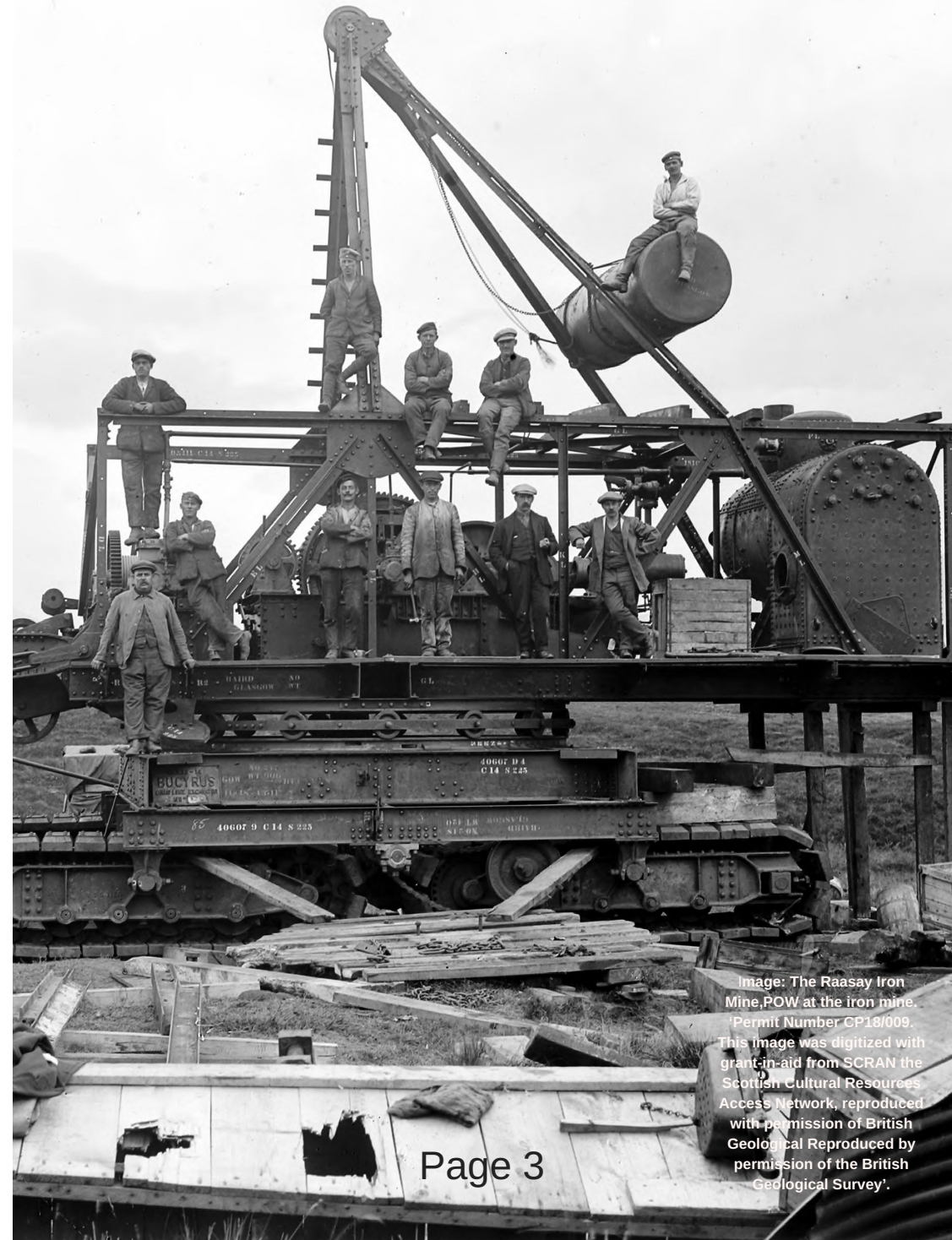


Image: The Raasay Iron Mine, POW at the iron mine. Permit Number CP18/009.

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