

Visit to a Scottish Link

By Kathryn Hansuld Lamb

TO THE woman wearing a Women's Institute badge, doors are readily opened. I found this in June when my husband and I were visiting Scotland.

Our hostess was Mrs. Nicol Thomson, busy secretary of the Seafield branch of the Scottish Women's Rural Institutes. The Seafield and Anna P. Lewis branch, Oxford County, have been corresponding for six years, the contact having been made through the penpal service of the Institutes Branch.

When Mrs. Thomson learned that an Ontario member was going to Scotland, she insisted on a visit to her home. Our boat was three days late but Scottish hospitality was such that we cut out a tour of the English lake district to spend almost a week in the Thomson's home near Edinburgh.

Scottish "rural" members have a particular interest in Canadian instituters because it was Miss Emily Guest of Ontario who established the organization in Scotland during the First World War. The Seafield branch was started some years later. The 21st anniversary was marked just recently with a banquet and program in the village hall. Mrs. Thomson proudly took us on a tour of the hall. It is a fine building with facilities for meals, meetings, sports and quiet reading. Various groups in the village use it, including the institute and an organization of veterans.

Mrs. Thomson is a typical "rural" member. She lives in a block of gray stucco buildings called council houses. They are built by the local council and are rented, never sold. Most

of the people in Seafield (less than 2,000) live in similar homes.

Her part has two rooms and bath downstairs and three bedrooms upstairs. As there is no central heating, each room has a fireplace and there are corresponding chimney pots on the roof.

Mrs. Thomson heated water on the fireplace in the parlor although she had a stove in the kitchen. They were among the lucky families who have plumbing. Telephones and cars are seldom owned by the working people and they don't miss them.

"Outings" are a popular part of the institute program. They give the women the opportunity to see the beauties of their country, by bus or by boat. Mrs. Thomson told us of many of the splendid times she had enjoyed and another was coming up just after we left.

Her husband works in a colliery, a twenty-minute walk across the fields from his back door. He follows the oft-used footpaths through the fields which are bordered by hawthorn hedges. There is no direct road from Seafield to the colliery.

Mrs. Thomson's hobby is crocheting chair and dresser sets in a variety of lovely colors. A set which she made for me has been admired by many of my friends.

When I left she gave me her SWRI badge which I wear with pride. It is a white heart with the letters SWRI in crown effect at the top. Inlaid in blue, across the heart is the motto, familiar to Ontario members, "For Home and Country."



At the twenty-first birthday party of Seafield branch of the Scottish Women's Rural Institutes, organized by the late Miss Emily Guest of Ontario.