

The Doune

Rothiemurchus

September to November 1933

Dramatis Personae:

Kurt Hahn	German (Schiller: Wilhelm Tell), English (Macbeth)
Lady Cumming	Widow of Mansfield Cumming, 1 st Head of Secret Service ("C")
Alastair Hill	Nephew of Lady C., cramming for Woolwich and the army.
Frau Lina Richter	French, Politics
Bex Richter	Biology. Field study of birds and fauna. Maths.
Mr. Blyth-Martin	Tutor to Alastair; and Latin and French to boys.
Anne	Lady Cumming's maid
Mark Arnold-Forster	Pupils. Previously in Salem
Jocelin Winthrop-Young	" " " "

Non resident:

Miss McLean	Secretary to Hahn
Jack Ross	Chauffeur to Hahn
Mr Hunter	Head of Grantown academy, Maths.
Miss McBain	Nature study and poacher ?

Guests: Rudo Hahn, Alfred Brettauer, J. Wheeler-Bennet, Hans Bembé, John Martyn, William Calder, W. Arnold-Forster, Eleanor Winthrop-Young.

I am not certain the exact date, but it must have been near the end of September 1933 that two 13 year-old boys arrived at Aviemore station and were met by Jack Ross of Nethy Bridge in the Armstrong-Siddeley and driven to the Doune. Mark and I had been friends for 8 years and been together in Salem for the last two. The Doune made a tremendous impression on us with the Spey running north past us to the right as we looked over the open ground to the south. The Cairngorms looked magnificent with the Lairig Ghru dominating the scene. Immediately behind the house was the mound on which the old castle had been. Our room faced the view and Mark had the four-poster bed while I lay in a normal bed across his feet. Hahn was directly in charge of us, which was a combination of fun and disaster for me; Mark was half a head shorter than I was but in reality several years more mature. Indeed, Hahn once said: "Mark reached middle-age and discretion in his teens."

Alastair Hill must have been 19 years old and he had been at school in Pangbourne; a very fine person, powerfully built and with will power which was able to stand up to Hahn. The "head" had obviously hoped to make him Guardian of the school of three, and certainly Mark and I would have welcomed this. But Alastair had no intention of wearing shorts and being bound into a routine with us. He worked very hard with Blyth-Martin and, from time to time

took part in our activities. He played rugby for Grantown Academy with great success and enjoyed Hahn's Findhorn walks to Randolph's Leap and elsewhere. He did not join in our forest rambles, I think because they were, at first, run by a middle-aged lady. Miss McBain was a cheerful, friendly person who knew the Cairngorms like the back of her hand and was most informative about flora and fauna. She seemed to be a popular character as she was greeted with hoots of laughter when we met gillies or others on our walks and she explained what she was doing with us. After a couple of weeks Hahn told us that the walks would stop as he had been informed that she was a poacher and this seemed to him not advantageous for the embryonic school. However, he added: "She was a wonderful person!"

A letter of mine begins: "*Hahn and Lady Cumming are searching for houses.*" This was, of course the most important issue to be solved, but it was seldom that we were taken along. Of the few we visited the one that Mark and I selected was Duff House near Banff. It was on the sea, which we both felt would give us the chance to sail. It was also small, and it never occurred to us that we should one day grow into a large institution. On my 14th birthday in October Hahn gave me a book of the neighbourhood called "The Secret Spey" by Wendy Wood. The dedication in his own hand reads:

To Jocelyn Young
"a brother in arms" in building the new Salem;
with best wishes and many happy returns of the day.
Doune, Rothiemurchus, Aviemore, N.B.
Kurt Hahn, Oct. 25. '33

So it looked as if he had no doubts about the ultimate success.

The only contemporary account of a Doune guest is found in the biography of John Martyn, co-founder and later headmaster of the Doon School in India, written by his wife: "In the summer of 1933, John was spending a holiday with his parents in Sedbergh when Hahn suddenly arrived and said he wanted somebody to drive his car to Scotland. John gladly volunteered. They stayed together for several happy weeks at the "Doune of Rothiemurchus" a large house Hahn had rented at Aviemore. John and Hahn went for long walks together along the banks of Hahn's beloved Findhorn and across the Scottish moors while he recounted legends of the countryside. It did not seem strange to John that a German should be telling him the history of his own country. It was during those weeks with John that Hahn found the "Round Square" of Gordonstoun where his school opened the following year. In Scotland the manor house or farm is called "the square". At Gordonstoun it happened to be a circular building around a central courtyard. Hence the odd name for an international association of schools which calls itself "The Round Square Schools" of which the Doon School is a member."

The first punishment: Running up the spiral staircase I slipped and cracked a bone in my foot. I was taken to Grantown hospital where the foot was encased in plaster. I was excused all activities and had to lie in bed for a week. I assumed that having a cold bath was included among the activities. But Hahn found out on the third day and there was a terrific row, for not only had I skipped the very cold and very unpopular bath; but I had failed to register this in my Training Plan! Sadly I have forgotten the punishment but I will never forget having to stand in the tin bath with the plastered foot propped on a chair alongside, while Hahn poured cold water over me from one of the ever-present porcelain jugs of that day.

Daily routine included the morning run, long break for running, jumping or Hockey practice. After lunch rest on the floor. Sunday, Blyth-Martin on the piano and a hymn selected by me.

This was complicated as Lady Cumming used the “Ancient and Modern” Hymn book and the rest of us the “English Hymnal”. Once I forgot to give Lady Cumming the number of the hymn, she asked and I replied, without thinking: “You are 117”. She gave a delighted chortle but Hahn was furious and certain I had done it on purpose so the row lasted for two days.

Blyth-Martin was a quiet, slight, short-sighted man who hid behind his spectacles and occasionally looked over the top of them with a fierce glare. He was preparing for the Episcopal Church and would have made a fine teacher. I discovered on my second day there that he was a good pianist and also played the organ, so we formed a musical front and I used to pester him to play Bach in the evenings. A very kind man who we all grew fond of.

Bex was, of course, in his element and in a short time he had turned me into an ornithologist, which I have remained ever since in many different countries. He generally had a sick bird or beast in the house. My first letter from the Doune starts: “*Bex is healing a pigeon that is ill and cannot fly.*” The succession went on with other birds and culminated in Duffus with a Guillemot and a bat at the same time. The Guillemot he saved and we set it in the sea at the old harbour. The bat tended to escape and create chaos with the ladies in the house. It was finally freed from its cage by persons unknown. Hahn? He used to take us out at night to listen to the stags roaring. Hahn’s brother Rudo came on a visit and went out with us and roared back, he was very convincing to us and also apparently to the stags.

Duffus House
November 1933 to March 1934

Dramatis Personae:

Kurt Hahn	
Lady Cumming	
Frau Richter	
Bex Richter	
Mr Blyth-Martin	
Mr. Ross	English, History
Alastair Hill	left in November
Miss Eileen Rock	Hahn’s secretary
Anne, Lady C.’s maid	cook
Bill Richmond	Pupils
Francis Noel-Baker	“ “
Mark Arnold-Forster	” ”
Jocelin Winthrop-Young	“ “

Non resident:

Dr. A.C. MacDonald	
James Black	Barber
Jack Ross	
Mr. Findlay	
Mrs. Gordon Duff	

I am not certain of the day we moved from the Doune to Duffus House, but we were definitely there by Armistice day as we went to Duffus Kirk for the ceremony and I still recite to myself the Minister’s roll call of the fallen with: “Evelyn Dunbarr Dunbarr Dunbarr Rrivers”. A letter of mine goes: “*We have moved to Duffus House. This place is not a touch*

on the Doune, of course, no hills, no river, no moors, no deer, but it is warmer, 2 miles from the coast and lots of sea birds. One can describe the house as being much too full of portraits. All the walls are covered with Dunbar ancestors. We have only one bathroom for 12 people!" There was nowhere to play Hockey; this was infuriating as there was a fine meadow outside the sitting room window, which was reserved for cows. However, *"Herr Hahn and Bex played for Elgin against Inverness, Elgin lost 2:1 and Bex cut his lip and had to have a few stitches put in it."*

After the Christmas holidays : *"We arrived safely and Bex came in the same train from King's Cross. Mark arrived with Hahn later. Mr. Ross is a typical Oxford man, thin, a fair athlete and scholar, but not such a character to him as Mr. Martin. Miss Rock is terrible, she thinks we are little babies. On the day we arrived I took Ross and Francis to Duffus Castle and Gordonstoun."*

Francis Noel-Baker was the son of Philip Noel-Baker, Labour politician and later awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Bill Richmond was the son of Admiral Richmond, Naval historian and later governor of Gordonstoun.

As at Salem, after lunch we had to rest, lying on the floor: *"Hahn has instituted a new rule; each boy in turn shall read aloud what he chooses, to the others. So that Mark reads Cobbet or Paradise Lost! My high-jump pit is finished."*

The most significant development was our contract to Hopeman. Mark and I were both enthusiastic on-going sailors and may well have given Hahn the idea of finding work for us by the sea. Bill, who should have been of our party, was generally averse to any new activity Hahn produced. As there was nobody yet to take charge of us at sea, we were sent to work in Finlay's boot-building yard. Our first task was helping build the Seine-net boat "Braemou". Mark was very good with his hands and soon found general approval from Finlay and the future crew who sat behind us on a bench watching us hammer in the rivets with eagle eyes. I am afraid I came off badly and there was often audible and critical remarks from the crew.

We used to be driven there and back by Jack Ross in the Armstrong-Siddeley. On one occasion the car did not appear and all five of us started walking back to Duffus. Just before the Burnside turn, we were overtaken by a great character and good friend of the school, Mrs. Gordon-Duff driving her Baby Austin she stopped and we all piled in and when she dropped us at the west lodge at Duffus house, she said: Some day it will be a fact worth recording that I drove the whole school in my little car!"

Jocelin Winthrop-Young