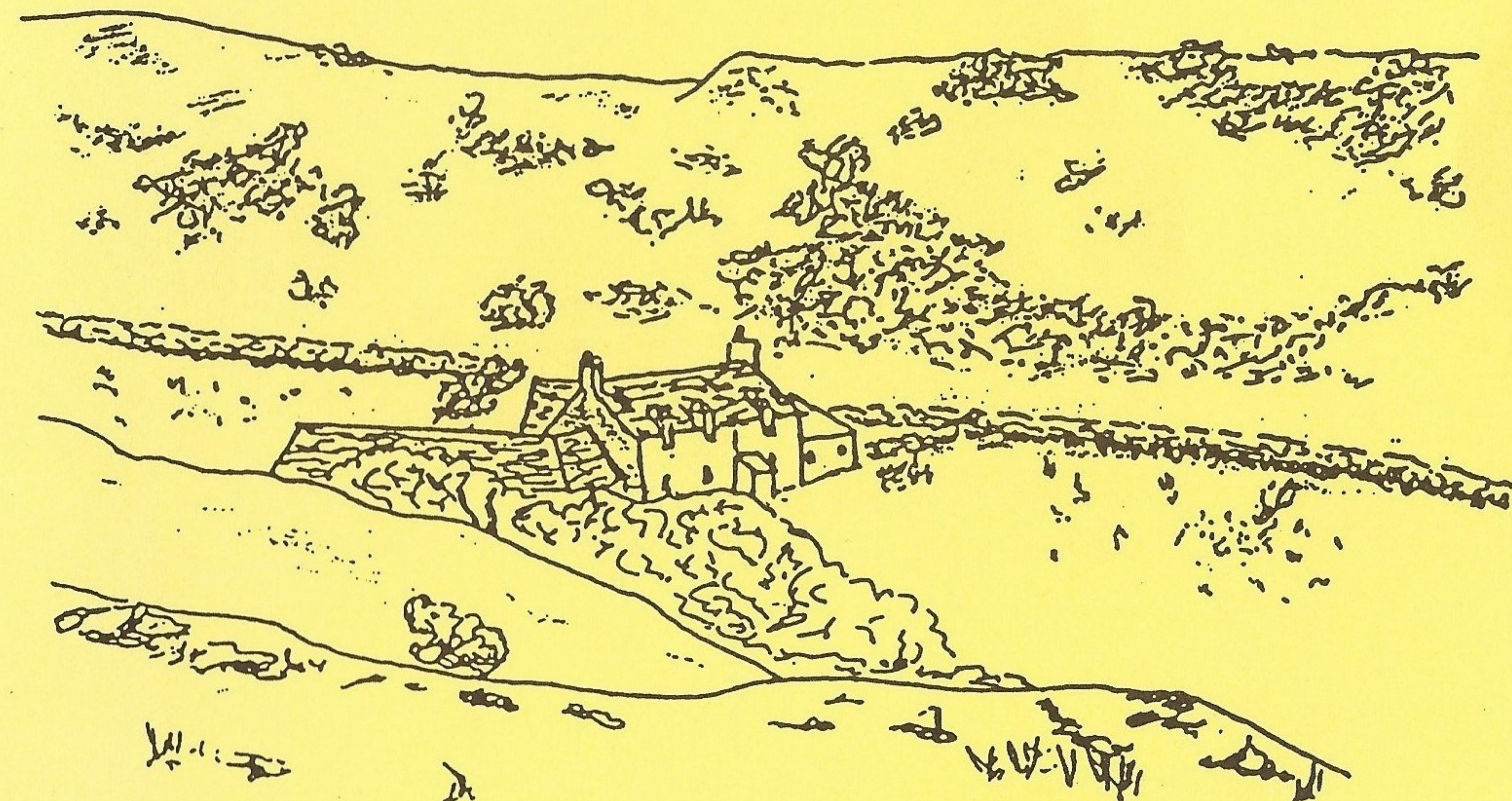


JURA and GEORGE ORWELL

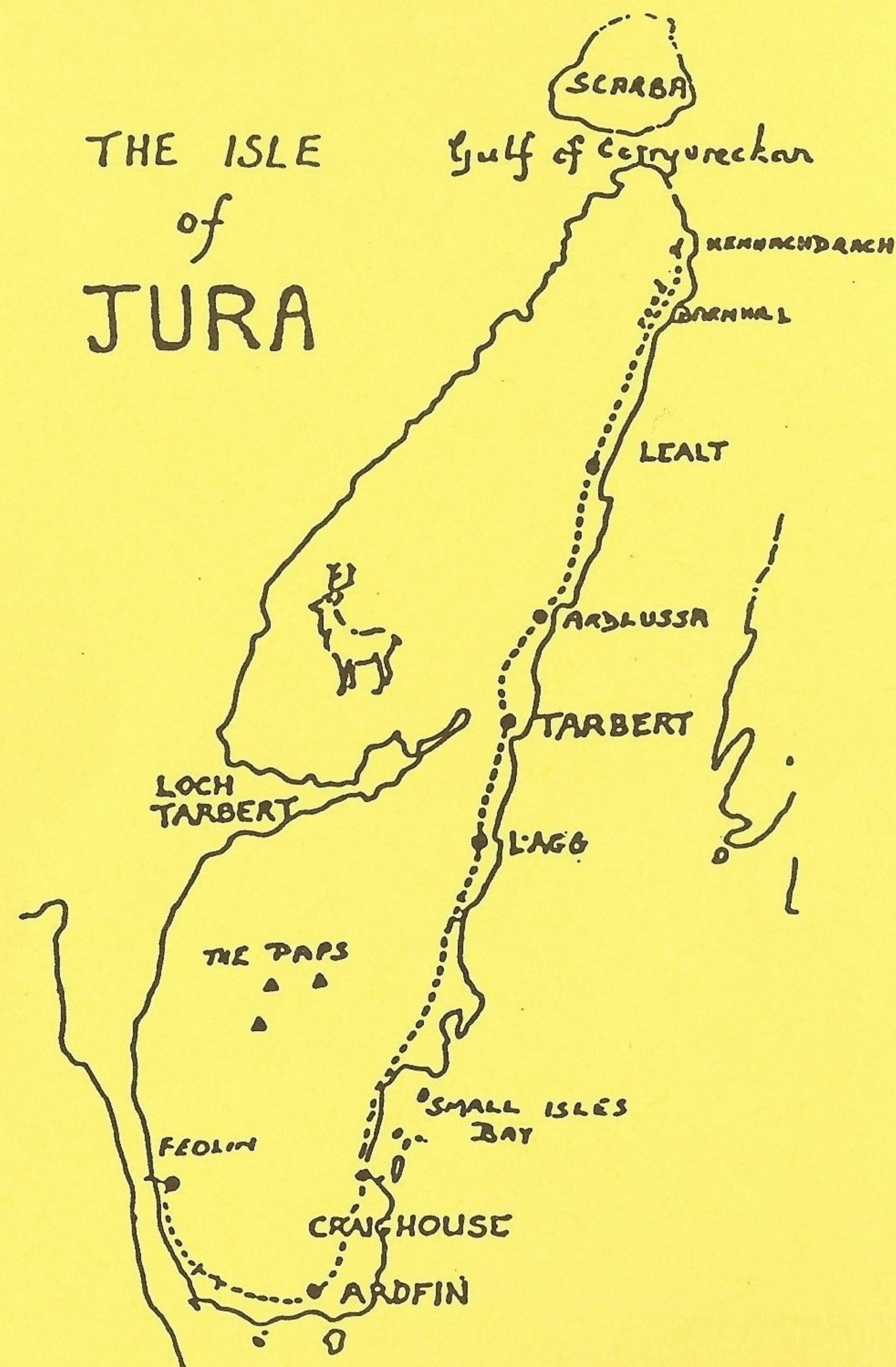


Barnhill - Isle of Jura.

by Gordon Wright
Isle of Jura

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INTRODUCTION

This booklet was first produced in 1983. The purpose was to provide some information for those who would come to Jura in 1984 to see where George Orwell had written his book '1984'. We expected an invasion of 'Orwell followers'. In the event we did have a large number hoping to see Barnhill - but not as many as we expected. In fact the main invasion was in 1983 when press from all over the world and film crews came knocking at the door to find out what they could.

Part of a film crew stayed in the Jura hotel and part in the Crinan hotel. There were incidents of land-rovers being overturned and cars bogged down north of Ardlussa. Most of the filming was done at Barnhill but some was done on Craighouse pier and by the shop. Those of us who live here had a few laughs; an enormous post-box was put outside the shop - such as we have never seen on Jura; the Jura stores was re-created not in the existing shop but in the house next door; milk was to be found in the shop in bottles. In Orwell's time milk was collected from local farms or crofts in cans and milk has never been seen in bottles on Jura.

Correspondents came from all over the world to write about Orwell and '1984' including Japan and Korea. The young lady from Korea could hardly speak a word of English and it was difficult to make sure she got her facts correct. She had a habit of putting extra noughts onto numbers so that the total population of Jura rose from 200 to 2000.

When this booklet was produced we expected it only to be in demand during 1984 but demand has continued ever since. The original text remains unaltered.

D G B Wright

May 1993

Jura and George Orwell

George Orwell first visited Jura in September 1945 on the recommendation of his friend David Astor, but it was in April 1946 that he finally came to live at Barnhill - a remote farmhouse at the north of the island. Here he set about farming and gardening in a small way and at the end of 1946 planted some fruit trees. From his letters it appears that he was anxious to get away to a place where he could not easily be got at. 'I am anxious to get out of London for my own sake because I am constantly smothered under journalism. I want to write another book which is impossible unless I can get six months' quiet . . . somewhere where I cannot be telephoned to.'

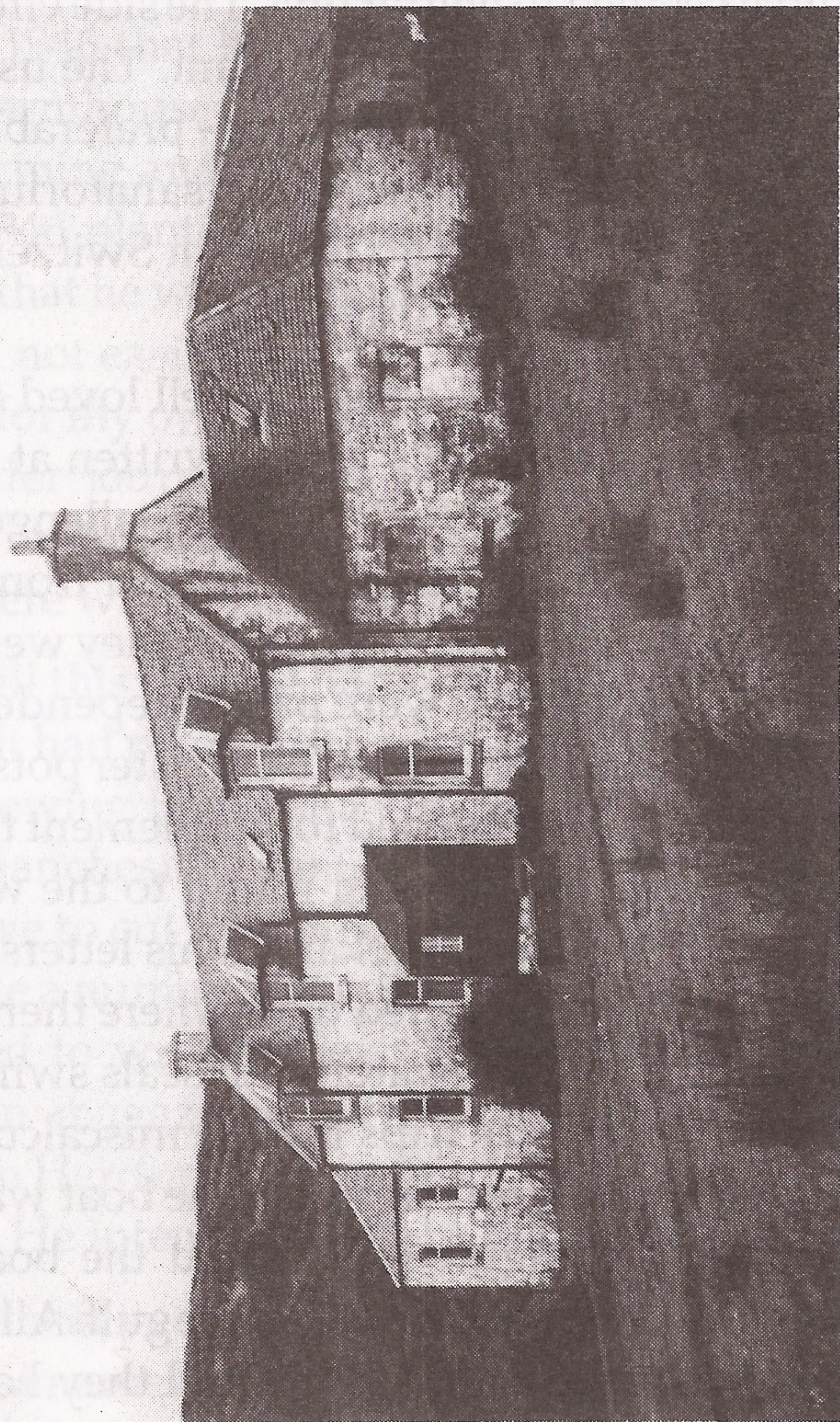
Up until this time he had not only written a number of books but had primarily been involved in writing articles and reviewing books for various newspapers - the Observer, Manchester Evening News and Tribune. In spite of his resolve to cut himself off he did not do so completely and made a number of trips to his flat in London. He also continued to write reviews for the Observer and some American magazines. In 1947 he gave up his rented cottage in Hertfordshire and in 1948 he gave up his flat in London. He intended to make Barnhill his only home.

To the local people George Orwell was always known by his real name of Eric Blair. He made few friends while on the island, probably because of the isolation of where he was living, but those who knew him remember him as a quiet sad looking man who was dogged by ill-health. He had trouble with his lungs which was eventually diag-

nosed as tuberculosis. At that time little was known about drugs for T.B. although they had been experimenting successfully with a drug called Streptomycin in America. Lord Astor managed to get some sent over from America for him and it seemed to help at first. The side effects of the drug were not, however, very pleasant. The usual treatment was rest and plenty of fresh air - preferably at high altitudes. He spent some time at a sanatorium in the Cotswolds and planned to go to one in Switzerland. He died shortly before he was due to go.

There is no doubt that George Orwell loved the peace and solitude of Barnhill - his letters written at that time reveal this. He also revelled in the challenge of self-sufficiency. He attempted to provide food from the garden and also from the sea. He wrote that they went fishing nearly every night as they were partly dependent on the fish for food. He also put down a few lobster pots and shot rabbits when they were needed to supplement the larder. He had a boat and loved going round to the west coast through the Gulf of Corryvreckan. In his letters he wrote of 'the completely uninhabited bays where there is beautiful white sand and clear water with seals swimming in it'. It was on one of these trips that he miscalculated the tide with almost disastrous results. The boat was caught in a whirlpool, the engine fell off and the boat turned upside down by one of the islands in the gulf. All the party managed to reach the island safely and they had to stay there until they were picked up by a passing fishing boat.

Although Barnhill is isolated, George Orwell considered that they were better off living in Jura than they would be in London. 'The house is more weatherproof



Barnhill - as it is today.

Orwell's study was to the right of the door but most of '1984' was written in the bedroom (top left) which was immediately above the kitchen. Visitors spoke of hearing the pounding of his typewriter overhead when they were standing in the kitchen.

than my flat in London... one is better off for fuel here and on the whole better off for food... There is wood and peat which is a fag to collect but which help out coal!

While at Barnhill George Orwell was not living alone but he and his adopted son, Richard, were looked after by his housekeeper - Susan Watson. Later, his sister Avril came to live with him and Susan left after the two women had a disagreement. He attempted to farm Barnhill with the help of Richard Rees and Bill Dunn, who had lost a leg during the war and was keen to start farming.

The book '1984' was written while Orwell was living at Barnhill although he had the idea for the book some years before. After amending it he made a great effort and in spite of increasing discomfort he typed it out himself ready for the printers. The extra strain of doing this did not help his condition and throughout this time he was a very sick man.

For some time he could not decide on a title for his new book and swithered between '1984' and 'The Last Man in Europe'. For the title '1984' he simply changed round the last two numbers of 1948 - the year in which he completed the book.

Barnhill still stands and on the outside at least is much the same as it was when George Orwell was its occupant. It is at present let on a long lease and it is regretted that access to the inside is not possible.

[At the date of reprinting (1993) the house is no longer let on a long lease but is available as a holiday cottage for short lets.]

The Reminiscences of Mrs Nelson of Ardlussa.

(Mrs Nelson still lives at Ardlussa. Of all those living on the island she came to know George Orwell better than most. She was his next-door neighbour - even though they were living six miles apart - and all traffic to and from Barnhill passes her door. In one sense she was the nearest link that Eric Blair - as she has always known him - had with the outside world. The following is how she remembers him.)

I remember the April day in 1946 that George Orwell arrived. He had heard about Jura from David Astor while he was a correspondent with the Observer Newspaper and in 1944 had written to my brother, who then owned Ardlussa, to find out if there was a suitable house to rent. My brother was killed in action in October 1944 so he renewed the correspondence with me when I returned to Jura in 1945. I suggested that he and his wife came to stay - to see Barnhill for themselves before making a decision. Eric George Orwell was known locally by his true name of Eric Blair) - wrote back to say that his wife was having to undergo an operation but that when she recovered they would like to come to Jura for about ten days. The next letter came to say that his wife had died during the operation. He then decided to come to Jura on his own.

Eric arrived at Ardlussa by the post-van and my husband Robin and I took him to Barnhill the next day. I well remember my first meeting with this tall, gaunt and sad-looking man and being extremely anxious as to how he would manage on his own. I offered to help with food

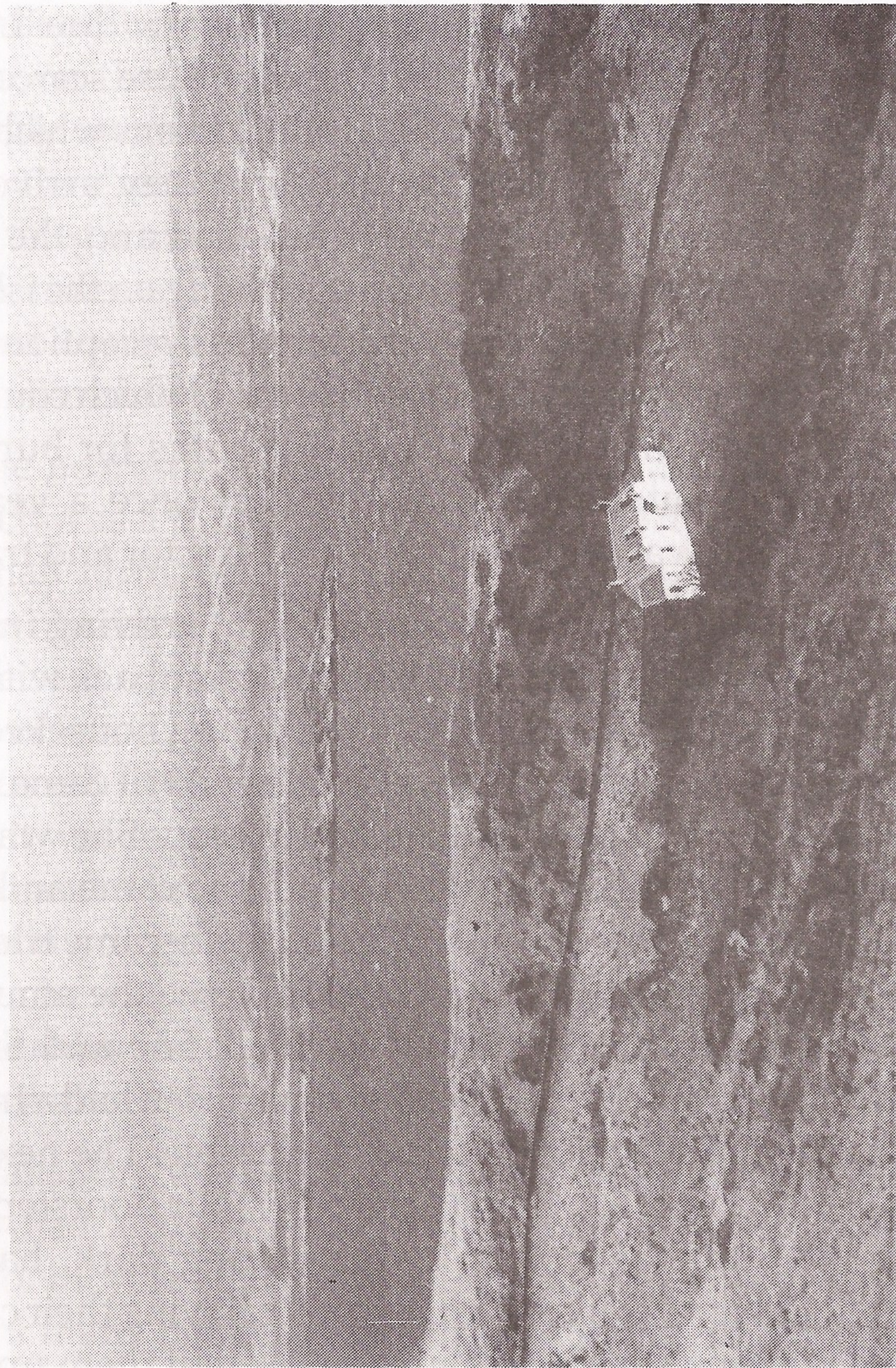
supplies which were still strictly rationed and difficult to obtain. He said that he would be all right and preferred to manage on his own. I had the impression that he was content as long as he had a roof over his head and a loaf of bread to eat.

Barnhill is a solidly built farmhouse 23 miles north of Craighouse and up a road which deteriorates to a track for the last five miles. It had been empty all during the war and although structurally sound was badly in need of repair. It had been used before the war by a stalker or shepherd. Ardlussa, 7 miles south of Barnhill, is where my husband and I lived with our small children, and Craighouse, the main centre of the island is a further 17 miles away. There is the only shop, doctor, post office and at that time the only telephone. Before Eric arrived we had done what we could to make the place look habitable. Building materials were scarce and we had other houses round Ardlussa also in urgent need of repair. We spent a number of days putting back slates, painting and cleaning rooms, lighting fires and trying to make it more presentable.

Eric started with very little furniture; he had only his basic needs - a camp bed, table, a chair or two and a few essential cooking utensils. We lent him some furniture and gradually more was obtained but even by the end of his time on Jura the house never looked comfortable and except for the warm fire his sister, Avril, had in the kitchen it was fairly bleak. It was certainly a spartan existence to begin with but it was the way he wanted and gave the conditions under which he liked to work.



Craighouse - as Orwell would have seen it and the Paps of Jura.



Barnhill, North Jura and the Sound of Jura

War-time shortages were still on. Sugar, butter, flour, bread, meat, sweets and various other commodities were rationed. We all relied on a weekly order to the shop which kept our ration books and sent up our due. Lighting was by lamps and candles. Candles were scarce and paraffin for the lamps came in 40 gallon drums which had to be man-handled many times before they arrived at Barnhill. Petrol was also strictly rationed and the post arrived twice a week 24 hours after arriving on the island. There were no newspapers and wireless reception was poor. There was plenty of wood and peat, which could be cut and dried during the summer months for burning during the winter. Coal came by boat once a year to Ardlussa and was taken to Barnhill by tractor and trailer.

I remember Richard, his adopted son, arriving in July 1946. Eric went down to fetch him and came back with the little boy, barely able to walk, and a young housekeeper, Susan Watson, who was lame. His sister Avril came soon after this for a visit and decided to stay. She was an exceptional person. She was 41 when she came and had an interesting and varied life. We quickly became friends. One of her great gifts was to be able to see the amusing side of the many problems at Barnhill. She and Susan clearly did not see eye to eye and when Susan had a friend up to stay the situation became intolerable. The next we knew, Susan and her friend arrived on our doorstep one very wet evening just as it was getting dark, having walked the seven miles from Barnhill carrying their cases. Susan was in a state of exhaustion. We put them up and they left next day by the post bus on their journey back to London.

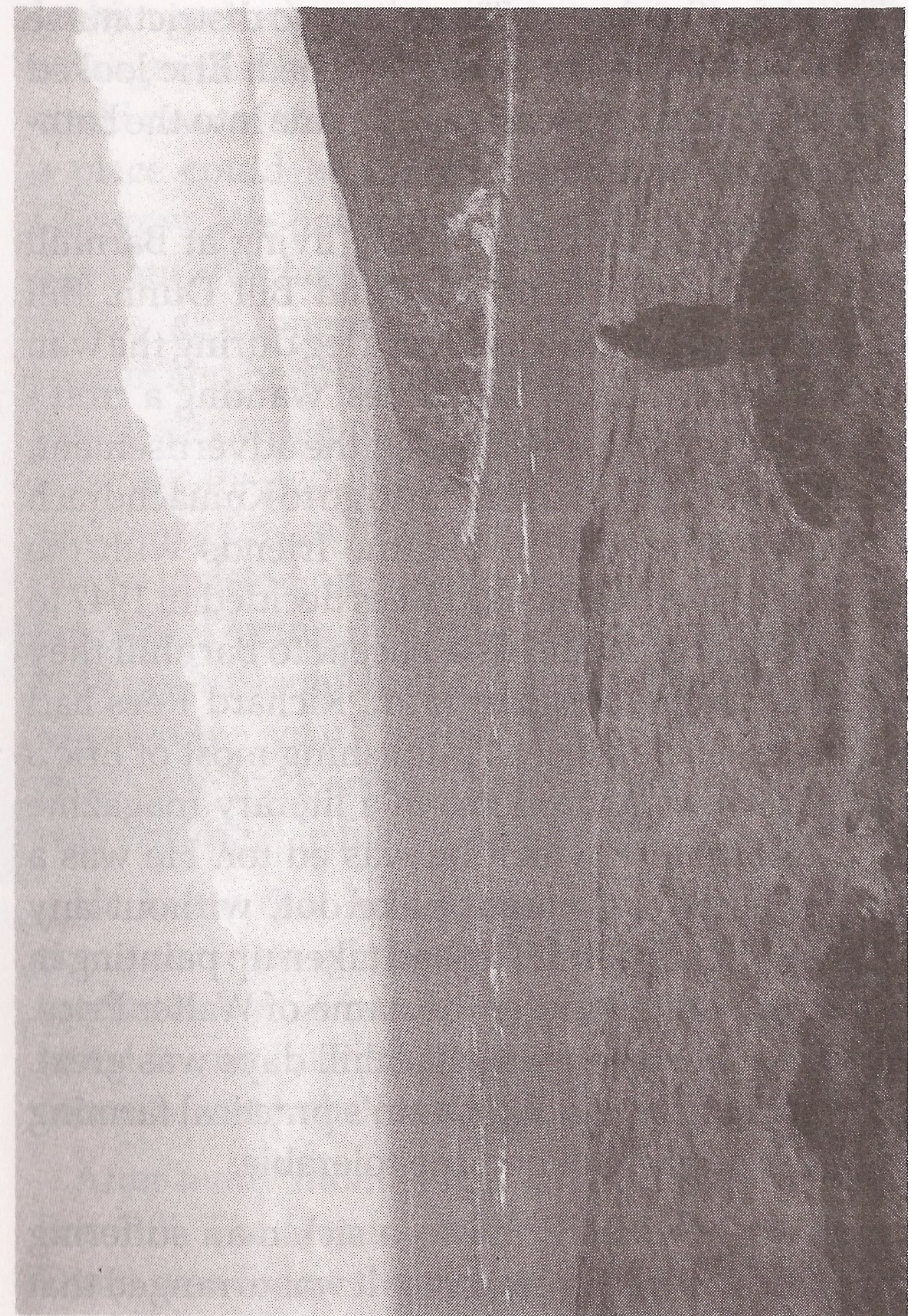
That first summer many friends and relatives came and went. Some marvelled, on arrival, at the peace and tranquillity of life on Jura but found it difficult to accept the isolation. To many of them we gave hospitality and helped them on their journey. Coming from London they had already travelled 24 hours by train, boat and bus by the time they reached Ardlussa. As there was no telephone and telegrams came by post many visitors arrived at the same time as the telegram announcing their arrival. This added complications as there would be no-one down from Barnhill to meet them.

The nearest neighbours were either at Kinuachdrach, which was a mile and a half further north where we ran a small farm, or ourselves at Ardlussa. Milk and eggs were obtained from Kinuachdrach but all the groceries were sent up once a week from the shop in Craighouse. One of Eric's friends claimed that Avril deliberately failed to put salt in the food. This may have been so but I believe that it was more likely that the shop had temporarily run short and was waiting for the next order to come by the monthly cargo boat from Glasgow. Avril, with Eric's help when he was well enough, dug the garden and grew what vegetables she could. It was difficult to keep out the deer which abounded round the house.

Transport was varied and unreliable. To begin with they had a rowing boat with an outboard engine and a motor bicycle which was constantly breaking down. Eric spent many hours sitting beside the road tinkering with the engine and hoping that someone would appear who had more mechanical knowledge than he had. My older

children remember him often coming to the house, usually in oilskins, wanting help. He often carried a scythe on the back of his motor bike with which to cut the rushes which grew rapidly in the middle of the road. The rowing boat was nearly lost in August 1947 when Eric was on his way back from a camping trip on the west coast of the island. He had miscalculated the tide race in the Gulf of Corryvreckan, the outboard engine had been washed off and the party which consisted of Eric, Richard (aged 3), a nephew and neice managed to row the boat to a small island in the Gulf where they scrambled ashore. The dinghy overturned on the rocks with the little boy underneath. He was rescued by Eric. They waited there several hours before a fishing boat came by and they were rescued. A pony was lent them but it had a will of its own and soon got the upper hand and refused to go into the shafts of the pony cart. It was very occasionally ridden down for the mail. Richard Rees, who came to live at Barnhill a year later with Avril and Eric, bought a lorry which did for a while but was continually needing attention. Tyres and spare parts were difficult to obtain. There were two men working at Ardlussa at this time who had a good working knowledge of engines and many times they helped get the varied Barnhill transport working again. Later they had a larger boat which was used to come down to Ardlussa for visitors and supplies when the weather was good. Before they left they had an old Austin truck.

During the time that Eric was living at Barnhill he did occasionally bring Richard in for me to look after for a day or two with my four children, but I know he was always



The Whirlpool of Corryvreckan

It was here that Orwell's boat was wrecked when returning from a tri to the west coast. The Isle of Scarba is across the sound.

reluctant to ask. One day he brought Richard down with a badly cut forehead which he had done by falling off a chair onto a glass. This had to be stitched so we sent the car to Craighouse for the doctor. There was no district nurse so I held the boy while the doctor stitched. Eric looked miserably unhappy and occasionally came into the bathroom to see how we were getting on.

Apart from Avril, two others made living at Barnhill possible. They were Richard Rees and Bill Dunn. Bill Dunn was a young Scot who had lost a leg during the war. He had advertised in the 'Oban Times' wanting a croft - preferably on Jura. We had answered the advertisement, had him to stay and arranged for him to go to Kinuachdrach to help Donald Darroch. He became friends with the Blairs and when Eric and Richard Rees decided in 1947 to ask for the tenancy of the fields adjacent to Barnhill they asked Bill to manage the small farm. Richard Rees had been a friend since the thirties, publishing most of Eric's early essays, reviews and poems in a literary magazine called 'The Adelphi' of which he was editor. He was a lonely figure as far as I could make out, without any family. Leaving 'The Adelphi' he had taken up painting in middle age and painted under the name of Walter Price. His devotion to Eric during the Barnhill days was great. With his financial help and Bill Dunn's practical farming knowledge, life at Barnhill became tolerable.

From the time he came Eric was a sick man suffering from Tuberculosis. As he grew worse it was arranged that a specialist should be called from Glasgow to see him as he was too ill to travel. This was in December 1947.

Richard Rees brought him down from Barnhill and he stayed in our house for about a week. The specialist arrived and after examining Eric told us on no account to let him go back up the rough road to Barnhill. There was a danger that he might have a severe haemorrhage which could prove fatal. He was to be kept quiet and in bed until a place could be found for him in a sanatorium near Glasgow. We had already looked after him for several days but after hearing what the doctor had said he refused to stay any longer saying that it was unfair for him to remain and be a risk to our four young children. We urged him to stay explaining that we were keeping all his things separate and would destroy his bedding after he left. We said that a few more days would not make any difference but he insisted on summoning Richard and returning to Barnhill. During this time I recall him having long talks with my husband, Robin. They had both been at Eton - but Eric twelve years earlier. He told Robin that he was anxious to have enough strength left to finish the book he was writing. He felt it had an important message.

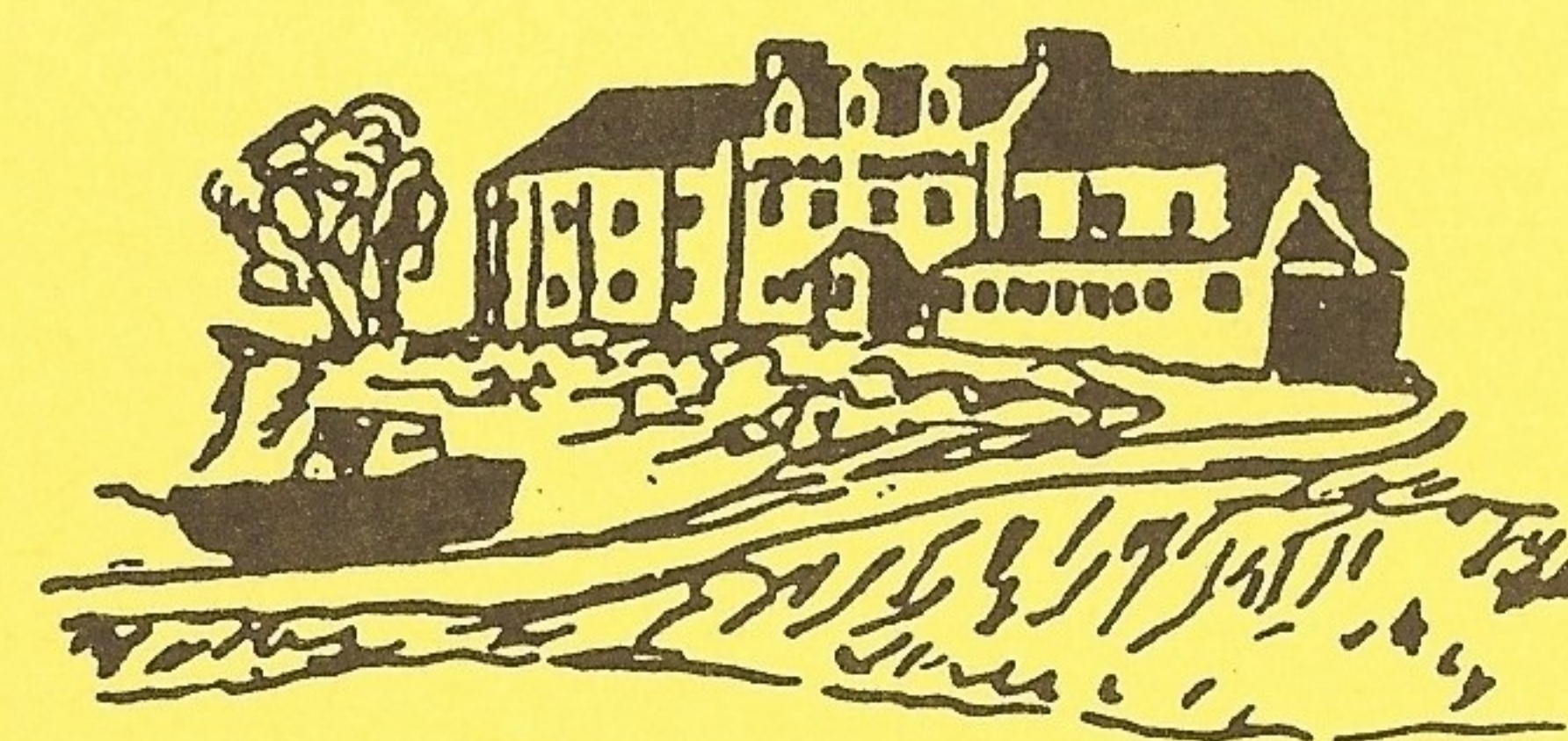
He knew that he had not very long to live. On one occasion I thoughtlessly left a bottle of painkillers for toothache by his bed. I was in the garden when I remembered it and hurried in. I need not have worried. Eric's concern was to have enough strength to finish his book.

After many months in a sanatorium Eric came back to Barnhill. The farming enterprise was got under way. Bill Dunn was living there, running some cattle and getting the fields ready to grow some crops. I think Eric came to realise that his vision of Jura being divided into small-

holdings for dairy farming was totally impractical. The distance from markets, the difficulties of getting supplies and the isolation are too great for all but a few exceptional people. In spite of Bill's hard work and the help of Avril and friends, the farm at Barnhill hardly broke even let alone made a living wage.

We were sorry when the inevitable came. Eric had to move south - too ill to continue living at Barnhill. The farm closed down and Bill Dunn moved to the mainland where he later married Avril. Sonia Brownell, who had married Eric while he was in hospital just a few weeks before he died in January 1950, came up in February to stay with us at Ardlussa. Robin took her to Barnhill which she saw for the first time and where she went through Eric's papers. She was clearly upset by its lack of comfort and amenities and felt that she could not have lived there without drastic modernisation.

The book '1984' was written during Eric's time on Jura and was completed in 1948. He spent many hours in bed in the room above the kitchen with his typewriter on his knees working on the final draft of his manuscript. The sound of his urgent typing to complete the work could be heard constantly in the kitchen below. He thought much about the title and finally decided to reverse the last two numerals thus turning 1948 into '1984'.



JURA HOTEL

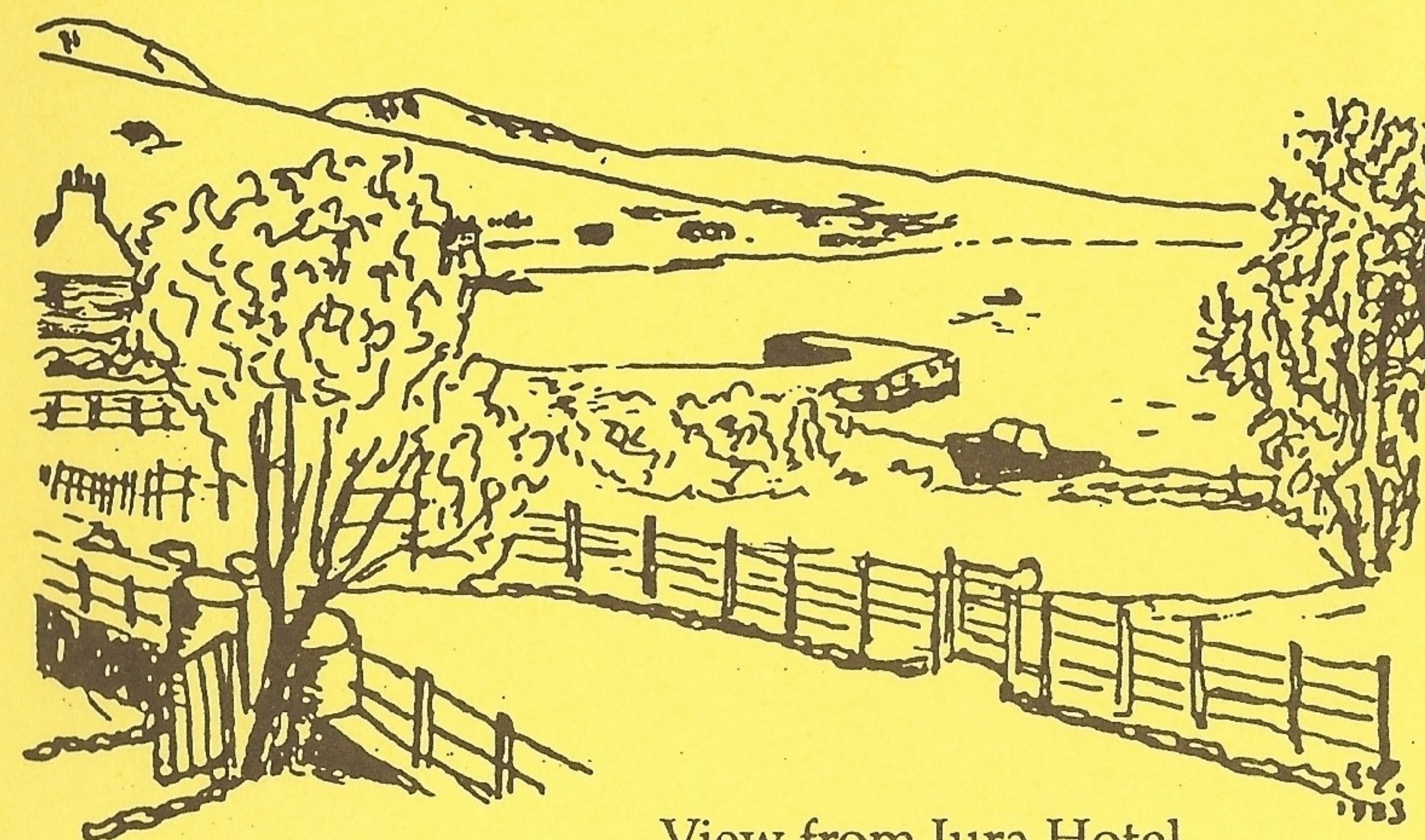
An ideal base from which to explore this unspoilt Island. Climb the Paps, wander along the wild west coast, find standing stones and iron-age forts or relax on wide sandy beaches.

Come back to a warm welcome and good food. Dine on local produce - salmon, trout, venison, scallops, lobsters - and relax overlooking Small Isles Bay. Riding, sailing and fishing are all available.

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View from Jura Hotel