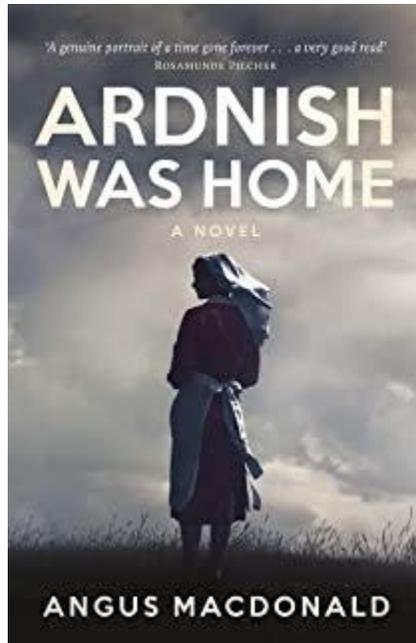


Ardnish was Home

By Rod Fraser



This is the first in a trilogy of novels about Ardnish, a rural area in the Western Highlands of Scotland. More particularly, it is a novel of the First World War, the Gallipoli Campaign and a love story involving Louise Jones, a nurse from Wales, and Donald Peter Gillies ('DP'), a young Scottish soldier in the 'Lovat Scouts' who hails from Ardnish.

It is a short book, just 244 pages, and well worth your while (if you choose to read it). It is written in

a lovely way, with parts of it telling of the escape of Louise and Donald Peter overland, and by boat, from the peninsula of Gallipoli all the way to Malta.

To give us the background and life history of this interesting young couple, the author has Louise and Donald Peter tell their stories to each other (and to us). Louise was brought up in Wales and had an impoverished and deprived childhood, her father earning his living in the mines.

In some ways, the war rescues her. There is a strong demand for nurses in the early years of the war due to the large casualties suffered by allied soldiers. This opens up the field to many young women who would not otherwise have had the opportunity. Louise thrives in this demanding occupation.

DP tells Louise of Ardnish, the sea around it, the striking views, his lovely childhood with his parents and friends, and the farming community of which he is a part. His father, Donald John Gillies, plays the bagpipes and has taught his son to do the same. In DP's mind, he won the lottery of life with his growing up years. Sadly his luck runs out when he is sent to Gallipoli.



Donald Peter Gillies and the 'Lovat Scouts' landed in Gallipoli in September 1915 and fought with other

allied troops against the Turkish Army in pitched battles over three months. In December 1915, they were withdrawn and evacuated to Egypt. The campaign was considered a debacle and the blame largely fell on Winston Churchill who advocated it.

Although the 'Lovat Scouts' arrived in Gallipoli in the fall of 1915, the campaign started much earlier, near the beginning of the year. 56,000 allied soldiers died there and a further 123,000 were wounded. The Turks suffered similar losses. The allied army was completely withdrawn from the Gallipoli Peninsula by January 1916.



The novel opens with DP lying on a cot at a field hospital, on the beach of Gallipoli, after being badly wounded in battle. He had been shot in the shoulder and blinded in both eyes. DP wears a bandage around his head "to stop the sand getting in [his eyes] and to keep the flies away." He is in severe pain.

The wounds occurred when DP, his friend Sandy, and two other soldiers were sent to assassinate "a top Turkish colonel". Sandy was the best shot in the battalion, so he pulled the trigger. Then the four soldiers tried to make their escape. Sandy was killed and DP tortured when they were captured by the Turks. When DP is finally rescued, he is badly

wounded and barely alive.

As luck would have it, Louise Jones, one of the nurses at Gallipoli had met DP the previous year in England when they were travelling by train. Here is Louise's account of their reunion.

"The tent flap opened. And a Lovat Scout officer said that a good man was coming in, he was in a bad way, and that I was to look after him...."

"I looked over ... and it was as if I had been punched. I recognised Donald Peter, my lovely soldier from the train. He was unconscious, with his red hair soaked with sweat, and a ghastly sheen on his face where he had been terribly burned.... I had to turn my head away, so the medical staff wouldn't see the tears pouring down my face...."

"Later on, I decide not to tell anyone but Prissie of my previous meeting with DP. I knew I would not be allowed to nurse him, if Matron knew. But I also knew I cared deeply for this man—after just a few hours on a train...."

"[All this, and my] yearning to help him, only compounded my wish to take him in my arms and hold him. But I couldn't...."

"Was he going to live? Had he recognised my voice? Did he realize who I was? I decided, with

a twinge of sadness, that he was almost certain not to have recognised me. And though it broke my heart, I wasn't going to tell him."

This is the beginning of the love story of Louise and Donald Peter, shrouded in secrecy and silence from the start. She is in love with DP, but keeps it to herself, for fear she will be transferred away. And Donald Peter, over time, responding to her voice, scent and gentle care, soon loves Louise in return.



There is a hospital ship in the harbour, the *Gloucester Castle*, used for the seriously wounded. As the Gallipoli campaign winds down, patients on the beach are transferred to this ship for transport to Malta. Soldiers are also leaving the beach and are loaded on troop ships. The Gallipoli campaign is soon to be over.

DP, and a number of other patients, are put on a small boat for the ½ mile trip from the beach to the ship. Unfortunately, the engine fails and the boat is thrown upon the rocks a mile or so away.

The patients and medical staff, including Louise and Prissie, disembark and huddle on the rocks, hoping for rescue. None is forthcoming. In the general disorder of the retreat, they are overlooked. The entire allied army is leaving Gallipoli and these patients are left to fend for themselves.

Those among them able to walk leave after the first day under the supervision of an officer. He promises to send help. Shelter in a farm house is found for those who remain. After a week or so, DP, Louise and Prissie conclude they have been abandoned. Their only hope is to walk overland to Greece, through Bulgaria. Fortunately they have a map, and Prissie finds a donkey to carry Donald Peter.

The remaining chapters of the book tell of their eventful journey, their near escapes and finally their arrival in Malta where Louise and Prissie assume their nursing duties and Donald Peter gets rest, relaxation and medical care.

Within the year, Louis and DP return to the United Kingdom to visit Louise's family and plan their future together in DP's beloved Ardnish. But just as they are within reach of home, fate deals them an unexpected blow.



This is a wonderful novel, one in a trilogy about Ardnish and the various war years (including the Boer War, World War One and World War Two). I highly recommend all three books in the series.

July 31, 2020