

**Got agus Earnal**  
**Gott and Earnal**

## Got

In the 1850's there were eleven crofting tenants in Gott, namely the Rev. Neil MacLean, Alexander MacLean, Hector Lamont, James MacCallum, Hugh MacLean, **Alexander MacKinnon, Neil MacLean**, Malcolm MacLean, John MacDonald, Murdoch Cameron and **Malcolm MacIntyre**. Of these, only Malcolm MacIntyre has a direct descendent living in Gott today – **Donald MacIntyre** (*Dòmhnall Eoghain Ghilleasbaig 'ic Chaluim 'ic Ghilleasbaig*).

This MacIntyre family of blacksmiths from Lochaber were among the skilled tradesmen brought to Tìree by the Duke of Argyll. They first settled in Heylipol and eventually moved to Gott.

### *1. An Gobhainn Beag*

Neil, (1843-1908) brother of Gilleasbuig and known as An Gobhainn Beag was a particularly skilled craftsman. For many years he had worked in France and Italy, specialising in making frames for street gas lights. When he returned to Tìree he practised his trade in the family smithy, the ruins of which can be seen today close to the road in the croft known as 'Croit Sheumais a' Ghobhainn. The story goes that a puffer which had been discharging coal on Gott Bay suffered an engine breakdown because the connecting rod (three inches in diameter) from the piston to the crankshaft had snapped in half. The skipper came ashore with the broken connecting rod and asked Neil MacIntyre if he could carry out a repair that would allow them to proceed home to the Clyde. The blacksmith forge-welded the rod, not only enabling the skipper to depart for home and arrive safely, but prompting a visit two years later when the same puffer returned to Tìree and the skipper was able to inform the blacksmith that his 'temporary' repair was still working perfectly! Apparently, Neil MacIntyre's repaired rod was driving this engine until the puffer finally went to the scrapyard.

Members of the MacIntyre Family emigrated to Osprey County, Ontario, Canada, in the 1850's continuing their trade as blacksmiths and 'MacIntyre's Corners' is almost certainly named after them.' They were among a large number of Tìree people who settled in this area and to this day, their descendents continue to be aware of and actively interested in their Tìree ancestry.

The MacIntyres ceased commercial blacksmithing in Tìree in about 1925. Donald MacIntyre took up smithy work again in the early 1940's and continues in the family tradition, being the last man in Tìree fully trained in the skills of shoeing Clydesdale horses which he now breeds as a hobby.

2. The **Rev. Neil MacLean** who came to Tìree in 1817 was a grandson of Neil MacLean, Crossapol, Coll. His father, Donald, also a minister, was mentioned in Boswell and Johnson's 'Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides' as the student who walked all the way to Aberdeen to study at the University.

The ruins of the old Church of Scotland manse which the Rev. Neil MacLean would have occupied when he arrived in Tìree lie in the field immediately west of the house known as Tullymet. The three-storey house, no longer a manse but a private house occupied by Miss Elizabeth Robertson, was to be his residence from the year it was completed, 1833, until he died at the age of the seventy-five in the forty-ninth year of his ministry in 1866.

We know that he had at least four daughters and one son, Donald, who qualified as a doctor and practised in Tìree. His story is a particularly tragic one in that while treating a female patient in Moss using a delicate and complicated method of creating a vacuum he set the bed on fire as a result of which the patient died. The fact that he was intoxicated at the time served to exacerbate matters to the extent that this poor man committed suicide in November, 1851.

The Rev. Neil MacLean, his wife Isabella MacDonald from North Uist, his daughter Mary Flora and his son Donald are buried in the Cladh Beag, Kirkapol.

### **Ecclesiastical sites**

The road which divides the Glebe in Gott goes over a small hillock known as Cill Chapull – the site of an ancient church. An abandoned Christian graveyard exists on the west side of this road. Here too is the area known as ‘Tir- chapull’ mentioned in the humorous poem ‘Garrow’ by Neil MacLaine (Niall an Tàillear) – Na Bàird Thirisdeach p.323.

‘Dh’ fhalbh e sin le sgrìob agus shìn e a cheithir chasan  
Cheart cho luath ri mìol-chù, na shìnteagan Tir-chapull.’

References to church history exist in Gott going back to Columban times. The small fort at the Scarinish side of Ben Gott known as Dùn an t-Sithein has sometime been called ‘Cìoch Chaluum Chille.’

Folklore also speaks of the cursed rock – ‘Molachdag’ – a small flat rock which lies at the west side of the Tràigh Mhòr. Calum Cille (St Columba), on one of his visits to the island, was foolish enough to tie his coracle to some weed growing on this rock and in his absence the tide rose loosening the mooring rope and causing the coracle to drift away. The Saint’s ire was great and he cursed the rock declaring that no seaweed would ever again grow on it.

3. **Neil MacLean** tenant crofter in the 1850’s was clerk of Kirkapol Church. He married Janet MacLean (sister of Alasdair MacThearlaich) from Sandaig. Their daughter Anne, married Alan MacFadyen (Ailean Dhonnachaidh Neill ‘ic Iain) and this couple have great grandchildren living on Tìree – Lachlan MacFadyen (Lachainn Sheonaidh Neill Ailein), Caolas, and Mrs. Donald MacKinnon, Kenovay (Grace Sheonaidh Neill Ailein).

4. **Alexander MacKinnon** (*Alasdair Ruaidh*) had a son Hugh who was a sea captain. His daughter Catriona was the mother of Capt. HÈctore Lamont (Eachann Beag) who built Ormer, Kirkapol. His own daughter Cursty married Iain MacKinnon, Heanish, and had the following children – Alasdair (‘Etto’), Donald, Mary, Anne, Catriona, and Maggie. Donald was a sea captain and Etto was for many years bosun’s mate on the Donaldson Line ship, the ‘Letitia.’

5. **Hector MacLean** who had a croft in Gott in the 1890’s and 1990’s was a brother of Alan Maclean (Ailean Mac ‘Illeasbuig Thearlaich), Kenovay. A shoemaker, he moved to Tobermory where he practised his trade for many years.

### **Gott Pier**

Gott Pier, the construction of which was begun in 1910 was completed in 1914. Previous to this passengers and cargo had to be ferried ashore from steamers which lay off Scarinish Harbour. Malcolm MacIntyre, father of Rosie who now lives in Scarinish, did all the necessary blacksmithing during the construction of the pier.

### **Radar Station**

In the early 1950’s, the government built an experimental Radar Station comprising seven giant scanners on Ben Gott. The construction of this station took some years and was a major boost to the local economy. As well as employing local labour, this project employed large numbers of mainland workmen many of whom were billeted in what is now the Village Hall, Crossapol. A new camp was built on the Reef to house the R.A.F personnel who manned the Radar Station.

## Healing Well – on Gott common grazing

Approximately 600 yards west of the main road, north west of the Council Dump, beside the most prominent ditch is the well, **Tobair Nam Ban Ruadh** (*The Well of the Red Haired Women*.) The water in this well, rich in iron, was believed to have healing power and people came from many parts of the island to fetch water when somebody was ill.

## **Earnal**

Earnal is the name given to the township between Gott and Balephetrish, characterised today by its lack of habitation as you travel along the road from Tullymet house to Balephetrish. Only the house renovated and owned by Andy Jackson today gives a clue to the former site of a small village set in a grassy green patch about half a mile to the east side of the road.

In this village **Hector** (*Eachann mac Chaluim*) had a house and smithy. He was born in an isolated house in Saltaig immediately east of Balephetrish, and the night of his birth poses an interesting query as to who the mysterious stranger who delivered him was. When his wife went into labour, Hector's father left the house to fetch help leaving her alone with the dog. After a time, the dog became agitated, growling savagely at the door when a voice from outside called, 'Ceannsaich an cù agad!' (Control your dog!) In came a woman totally unbeknown to Mrs MacDonald. 'Tha thu nad èiginn,' (You need help) she remarked. 'Tha,' (I do,) replied the woman in labour. 'Na biodh cùram ort. Seallaidh mise as dèidh a h-uile nì.' (Don't worry. I'll see to everything.) said the mystery woman.

Hector MacDonald, Eachann Chaluim a' bhuachaille, was duly born, carefully washed and placed gently in the cradle by the visitor who then placed her thumb on the boy's eye, left the house and disappeared into the night. She was never seen again and her identity was never established. But Hector had a blue eye and a brown eye for the rest of his life. As a blacksmith, Hector's trademark when shoeing horses was to have five nails on the outside rim of the shoe and the usual four on the inside.

His daughter **Flora** (*Fionnghal nighean Eachainn, mother of John MacFadyen, one time pier-master*) had the grazing rights for one cow from Tom Barr, tenant farmer of Balephetrish, for ensuring that the gate between Balephetrish and Earnal was kept closed.

Previous to this, another woman named Màiri Ruadh had the same grazing rights from Tom Barr's predecessor. The ruins of Màiri Ruadh's house can be seen on the west side of the Earnal/Balephetrish boundary wall.

2. Also from this small village was (**Mrs Mary MacLean**, nee Cameron), a widow, who lost not one but both of her sons in the First World War. Alexander was killed while serving with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders in 1917, and Duncan, also 1917 when the ship he was serving on was torpedoed. In later years this lady, whose loss shows just how devastating the misfortunes of war can be especially on small communities, moved to Scarinish.

3. **Archibald MacKinnon** (*Ghilleasbaig mac Chaluim 'ic Eoghain*) or *Gilleasbaig mac Chaluim a' bhuachaile*) known as 'Bigean Earnal' was believed to have special powers in the healing of sick animals. His method of healing was to place a coin in a bottle of water, uttering a certain incantation over this bottle. The water was then sprinkled over the sick animal from head to tail. Cattle often

made a miraculous recovery and even sceptics who ‘would have nothing to do with this nonsense’ (cion a’ mhothaich)’ were surprised at the success of the method.