

Sòdhaidh, Am Broc,
Rudhaig agus Salum

Soay, Brock,
Ruaig and Salum

Soay

Am Port Falach on the Island of Soay, part of the Ruaig Common Grazing, has a very interesting history. Tìree at one time was a major producer of whisky, the production of which, in the eighteenth and nineteenth century, was a Cottage Industry, every crofter in Tìree who grew barley owning a still for making whisky. In the late eighteenth century the government, as a means of raising revenue, began to tax whisky and to license distilleries and in 1801, Customs and Excise officials arrived on Tìree and discovered 157 illegal stills. Thereafter the making of whisky went underground.

Whisky that was produced secretly had to be shipped to Lowland markets and therein lay the difficulty, as fast Customs cutters regularly patrolled the sea round Tìree to intercept any vessel carrying illegally distilled whisky. In the sea loch on the south coast of Soay lies the small cove called **Am Port Falach** (The Hidden Port). A vessel lying in this cove with her mast down could not be seen from Tìree or by a passing Customs Cutter. The smugglers built a substantial pier in this cove for the purpose of loading illegally produced whisky on to craft which then sailed off, usually to the Clyde, to sell what was to the producers, a valuable product. The remains of this pier can be clearly seen to this day.

It took more than fifty years of pressure and harassment from Customs Officers or 'Gaugers' to wipe out whisky production in Tìree. Eventually, because of the increased Customs efficiency, it was no longer cost-effective, so the whisky-makers began to ship their barley across to Donegal in Ireland, where the process was carried out, also illegally. This continued for some years until that too was no longer cost-effective, and an industry which had functioned on Tìree for hundreds of years ceased.

Am Broc

1. **Archibald MacKinnon (Gilleasbaig Òg)**, born c. 1795 and his wife **Catherine**, born 1801, who crofted in Skipinnish had a family comprising **John, Neil, Flora, Donald, Cursty and Charles**. At some time in the mid-nineteenth century, at the factor's instigation, the family moved to Brock, staying for a time beside Tràigh Crìonaig.

Flora is believed to have died of smallpox.

Her brother, **John (Iain 'Illeasbaig Òig)**, Skipper-owner of the schooner 'Feannag', also contracted the disease. Although he recovered, the result of long illness and the fact that people were not willing to risk catching the infection was that not only did he lose his small shop but also the schooner. He was married to **Anne MacLean** and had a family of **William, Donald, Neil, Flora and Mary Anne**.

The three sons spent some time as seamen and all came back to Brock.

Flora never married and kept house for her brothers.

Mary Anne married **Donald MacKinnon**, Vaul, son of Hugh (Eoghan Ruadh) in 1887. Donald was a tailor who worked in Tobermory, Oban and Glasgow and their family comprised **Anne, Alick, Mary, Flora, Hugh, John, Elizabeth and Lachie**.

Flora and Elizabeth died in young adulthood.

Hugh was killed in action during World War 1.

Alick died in 1921 as a result of poisoning contracted while working in a munitions factory.

John was a seaman and settled in Tìree towards the end of the Second World War.

Lachie worked in Glasgow for twelve years and when he came home worked as a contractor with a lorry, and was for a time piermaster.

Anne learned the skills of dressmaking in Glasgow and came home to Brock before the First World War where she kept house for her uncles and continued to work as a dressmaker.

Mary married **Archibald John Sinclair, Oban** in Glasgow in 1922. They had a family of **Alexander MacKinnon, Iain Archibald** and **Joan Nancy**. Alexander is presently living in the family home in Brock.

Footnote

Iain 'Illeasbaig Òig would make a trip with his schooner to the Broomielaw, Glasgow, every year just before Christmas to buy goods to sell in his shop. With him would go **Sara MacMillan, Silversands (Mòrag an Fhuaranaich)** also to buy goods to sell in her family-owned shop.

2. **Charles MacKinnon (Tearlach 'Illeasbaig Òig)** emigrated to Australia about 1865 where he prospered, owning a small Shipping Line and other businesses. He paid for the building of a house for his sister Ciorstaidh (the house known today as 'Taigh Lachainn a' Bhroc'). He returned to Tìree on holiday in 1900 and while walking about Ruaig, the township he had left so many years before, remarked to Mrs Flora MacDonald, Skipinnish, 'Dh' atharraich a h-uile rud ann an Rubhaig ach Sgeir an Duiligh!' (Every feature of Ruaig has altered except Dulse Rock.)

Very little is known about Gilleasbaig Òg's two sons **Neil** and **Donald**.

On the night of the Tay Bridge Disaster (1879) when an exceptionally high tide hit the coast of Tìree, some houses close to the shore in Brock were so damaged that the owners had to build new homes approximately 100 yards away from the original.

Ruaig

School

After the Scottish Education Act, 1872, a County School was built in Ruaig opening in 1877 with Duncan Gunn as the second headmaster.

Archibald Lamont, brother of Lachlan Lamont **Lachainn Iain**, maternal grandfather of the late Flying Officer Iain MacLeod, RAFVR and Mrs. Anneen Black, Ruaig, great-grandfather of Mrs Dorothy Connor, Brock - This man along with a number of other Tìree Master Mariners, served in the Royal Naval Reserve during World War 1. During the Dardanelles Campaign he was in command of S.S Asteria and was awarded the D.S.C for his bravery, the citation for which reads as follows;

“The King has been graciously pleased to approved the award of Distinguished Service Cross to the undermentioned Officers in recognition of their services whilst employed in Transport Duties at the Dardanelles.

Lieutenant Archibald Lamont, R.N.R Cargo Carrier 'Asteria' – In command of the 'Asteria' has done excellent work in carrying supplies to Cape Helles and other beaches – always anxious to load quickly and proceed as often as possible regardless of weather. Has frequently experienced heavy shell-fire alongside the pier at Cape Helles during which he has coolly superintended the unloading of his ship. Having survived the war, Archibald Lamont died on board his ship after the Armistice was signed. He is interred in Constantinople.

Footnote: Archibald Lamont's father, *Iain 'Ic Dhòmhnail 'ic Thearlaich*, owned a smack the *Mòr Òg*.

Neil MacLean moved from the Balemartine area when he acquired croft no. 5 in Ruaig. Married twice, first to **Mary MacFadyen** from Barrapol and after her death to **Anne MacInnes** from Ruaig, he had family comprising **Donald, John, Hugh, James, Flora and Mary.** Apart from Donald, born 1859 and whose mother was Mary MacFadyen I do not know at this stage of which of his wives was mother to the others. Nothing is known of *John* who may have died young or emigrated.

Donald, Dòmhnall MacNeill, a Church of Scotland Minister, spent most of his life in Campbeltown and was married with two daughters.

Hugh, (Eoghan MacNeill), was a seaman who spent many years tramping the world in sailing ships. He then became a fisherman taking part in the East Coast Herring summer fishing and ultimately skippering the East Coast owned vessels. The boats in use at that time were dangerous in poor weather. The story goes that one night, with the boat's owner on board, the weather turned nasty as they were running back to harbour. The crew were constantly bailing with buckets as large amounts of spray came on board. As a massive lump of water smashed on board, the owner in a state of terror threw his arms round Hugh MacLean shouting 'She's doon! She's doon!' Eoghan MacNeill brutally threw him to one side and roared, 'She's not 'doon' yet! Bail!' The vessel was bailed and safely made harbour.

It was said of Hugh that because of his ability as a fisherman, no matter how poor the season at the East Coast Herring Fishing, he was able to come home at the end of it with plenty of money.

The family were remarkably self-sufficient and self-contained. *Flora, Mary, James* and *Hugh* had between them the skills of weaving, tailoring, shoemaking, woodworking and blacksmithing. Any food that could not be produced on the croft or wrestled from the sea was acquired by the barter system. Boxes of eggs were shipped off on the 'Dunara Castle' to a Glasgow Grocer and back would come a crate containing goods such as sugar, tea and some treats which were often enjoyed by Ruaig children.

3. Hugh MacLeod (Eoghan Beag) or Eoghan Dhòmhnail 'ic Neil 'ic Thormoid 'ic Iain 'Dhòmhnail Ghlais na Druimnin, Master Mariner from Ruaig, went through the rigours of both World Wars at sea. In the Second World War he was sailing as captain of large deep-sea cargo ships and was involved in the worst of the Atlantic and Murmansk Convoys.

On one occasion when a large number of British vessels were at the quayside in Murmansk on a fine clear night with a full moon Eoghan Beag fell foul of the Russian Harbour Authorities whose treatment of British Seamen in Murmansk was abominable.

With his long experience of red hot war, he considered it likely that a German Bomber Raid would take place and duly informed the Harbour Authority that when the dockers were finished work he intended to move his ship off the berth and close to high cliffs where he would be afforded more protection for the night. He was told by the Russians that if he moved his ship he would be shot.

Not being one to kow-tow to anybody and with the confidence of his own knowledge and experience, he duly moved his ship to the relative protection of the cliffs, only to be followed by some others who recognised and respected Captain Hugh MacLeod's judgement. A German bombing raid did take place that night sinking at their berths some of those vessels who had not moved, and completely devastating the quayside. Those who had joined Eoghan Beag were relatively unscathed. Having survived many dangerous situations throughout the war, Hugh MacLeod died in his bunk outward bound for New York towards the end of hostilities.

4. The Reverend Dr. Donald Lamont 1874 - 1958

One of the country's most eminent writers of Gaelic prose was born in the village of Ruaig in the house now known as Carsamul. Educated at Ruaig School and in Raining School, Inverness, he progressed through University to becoming one of Tìree's most able ministers. Many of his Gaelic contributions to the Church of Scotland Magazine 'Life and Work' for over forty years form the compilation published by the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society in 1960. The inspiration of many students of Gaelic at senior school and university, his prose writings are still highly regarded by scholars for their clarity and incisive observation of humankind - always gently provocative, never harsh.

Most of his ministry was conducted in Blair Atholl where a commemorative plaque has been placed in the Parish Church.

(Prose Writings of Donald Lamont ed. T. Muchison S.G.T.S. 1960)

Salum

1. The harbour in Salum was the last place on the island where East coast fishermen worked. These men began coming to Tìree to work when a pier was constructed in Port Bhiostadh in the Green, Kilmoluaig in the 1840's. When this harbour filled with sand blown in from the eroding Balevullin and Kilmoluaig machairs, they moved to Salum. Harbours on the north side of the island were used as they were closer to the fishing grounds for ling which stretched from north of Skerryvore to Barra Head. Fish in those days were salted and dried, wrapped in bales and transported to the markets in smacks and schooners. This type of fishing ceased just before the First World War as by then the Railway had arrived in Oban and Mallaig and the fish shipped off fresh to southern markets.

2. A Smithy operated in Salum, the ruins of which can be seen on the croft of Hugh MacInnes, and the last smith was a MacFadyen. Examples of his work were the old gates of Kirkapol Cemetery which had arrow type decoration. These were replaced about twenty years ago.

3. On the 19th of June 1896, a tragedy occurred in Salum Bay when John Munn aged 36 and his brother Hector aged 33, sons of Hugh Munn, Baugh (Eoghan mac Iain 'ic Aonghais 'ic Fhearchair) were drowned when out fishing in their boat the 'Delay.'

The 'Delay' was built by Hugh MacArthur (Eoghan Ruadh) of Port Loch an Aigh, Caolas, and was so named because Eoghan Ruadh, who was able to see into the future, had a feeling of dread and foreboding about this vessel and was extremely reluctant to complete her. Eventually he did, encouraged and nagged by his wife who had no such feelings and dismissed them as foolish. Sadly, Eoghan Ruadh's insight proved true.

4. The last boat built by Eoghan Ruadh of Port Loch Aigh was a skiff for the MacInnes family of Ruaig called the 'Times.' When this vessel was launched the story goes that he tapped her on the gunnel with his hammer and said to the MacInnes brothers, 'Falbhaibh leatha - cha dèan i car ceàrr

gu bràth.’ (Take her away – she will never do anything wrong.) And she never did. The MacInnes brothers worked her successfully for a long number of years.

Ruaig, Brock and Salum

Master Mariners

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|----|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. | Hugh MacLeod | Eoghan Beag |
| 2. | John MacInnes | Am Bàn |
| 3. | John Lamont | Seonaidh Iain |
| 4. | Archibald Lamont | Gilleasbuig Iain |
| 5. | Lachlan Lamont | Lachainn Iain |
| 6. | Charles MacDonald | Tearlach Ciorstaidh |
| 7. | Neil MacDonald | Niall Sgibinnis |
| 8. | Donald MacKinnon | Dòmhnall Eoghain |
| 9. | Iain Downie | Nephew of Eoghan Iain |

Ministers

- | | | |
|----|----------------|-------------------------|
| 1. | Charles Lamont | Tearlach 'ic Thearlaich |
| 2. | Donald Lamont | Dòmhnall Iain |
| 3. | Hector MacLean | Eachainn Alasdair |

Doctors

- | | | |
|----|------------------|--------------|
| 1. | Donald MacKinnon | ‘Doctor Dan’ |
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