

MUINNTIR TUATHANACH (THE MACKINNONS OF BALINOE)

My mother's mother, who I call Granny Kennedy, was born a MacKinnon and belonged to a family of MacKinnons that lived around Balinoe and Balemartine. In earlier times the place that we now call Lower Balinoe was called Cudheis (coo-yaish) which means God's Corner as there was a 6th Century Celtic monastery on the site of Sorobay Cemetery. The family record can be traced back to Granny Kennedy's grandfather (her father's father) John MacKinnon who was known as John the Farmer or *Iain Tuathanach* in gaelic. Ian's dates are not known to me but I estimate that he was born sometime around 1820-30. He had three sons. John, Hugh and Neil and our branch of the family is descended from Hugh who was known as *Eoin a' Tuathanach* or Hugh, the son of the Farmer.

Hugh was a blacksmith and must have been held in fairly high esteem in the township as the local crofters granted him the Balinoe croft to persuade him to remain in the district and look after their blacksmithing needs. The local blacksmith would primarily take care of shoes for the many work horses and the manufacture and repair of farm implements and fittings for the local boats. I was told that Hugh made the iron girders for the stone bridge over the small river at the East end of the reef. His smithy was situated on the foreshore in front of Ardlui out in front of the ruins of the house that once belonged to George Paterson's family. The Paterson's house ruins are barely visible today and there are no signs of the smithy. My mother remembered being at the smithy as a child and she often remembered getting in trouble for being under the feet of the horses.

Hugh was known by his profession.. the Smith or *Gobhainn* in gaelic. He first married Annie Campbell on August 15th 1877 at Moss Church. Annie was my Granny Kennedy's mother. Hugh and Annie had one more child, a son named Murdoch, and Annie died in childbirth with her third child which also did not survive. Several years later Hugh married again, this time to an Anne MacDonald.

Hugh and Anne had one child, a son Donald MacKinnon who married a Mary Flora Campbell. They first lived in Balephuill with Mary Flora's parents and later moved to Hynish . In 1924 they emigrated to New Zealand with their four daughters, Dolina, Annie, Mary and Sarah and a son Hugh. They settled in the Hawke's Bay area of North Island where as of 2009, the last of the daughters Annie McPhee is very much alive (age 92 in 2010) and well and surrounded by her family along with descendants of the other daughters.

Donald and Mary Flora's son Hugh served in World War II and was a fighter pilot with the Royal New Zealand Air Force in North Africa, where he was shot down and killed. There is a family "second sight" incident associated with the loss of "Cousin Hugh", as we knew him, that I will relate elsewhere. Edna, Cathie and I met the whole family for the first time when we all went to New Zealand around 1986.

Granny Kennedy always spoke very highly of her step-mother Anne who treated Granny Kennedy with great love and respect. My mother as a child, remembers Anne still staying in the old house at Balinoe when my mother's family went back to settle in Tiree around 1918. The old house stood on the site of the present Ardlui steadings and was supposedly very old.

Many of the rest of the *Tuathanach* family remained around Balemartine for the next few generations, notably in the croft known as The Farmhouse in Balemartine and I well remember as a boy visiting many of the relatives including *Ian Beag* in the Farmhouse, *Mairi MacKinnon (Mairi Kate Neill) Peigi Iain and Eighic Iain*. The Farmhouse family had four generations of Ians who were known as *Ian Tuathanach, Ian a' Tuathanach, Ian Beag nan Tuathanach and Ian Ian Beag*, (beag meaning little or son of) and this line of Iains was a stretch for the patronymic naming system.

One character of the *Tuathanach* family was Archibald MacKinnon also known as *Gilleasbuig Iain* or simply Baldy. He was a full cousin of Granny Kennedy and he spent most of his life working in Canada where he got up to all sorts of adventures the least of which were farming and mining. He came back to Tiree in his later years hoping that his brother (*Iain Beag*, Farmhouse) would take him in but his brother refused, so Granny Kennedy let him live in the little cottage that her brother Murdoch had owned out in front of Ardlui. (now a ruin) He paid for his keep by working around the croft and was involved in many dubious schemes including stealing electrical wiring from the now abandoned RAF facilities over on the Reef and using it to mend the fences around the croft. His most serious offence was leaving my three year old sister Anne out in the croft one day along with a calf that he had tied to a stake with a halter. The calf started running in circles around Anne and the stake until she was trussed up like the heroine in an old Western movie. Fortunately she wasn't injured but Baldy was in big trouble that day. Baldy existed on his government pension and he survived the winters by burning dried cow dung (*Sgantachain* I think they were called) that he collected all summer in the croft. He had learned to do this on the Canadian prairies in his youth. There were rats in his little cottage that he encouraged by feeding them until he was badly bitten in the face while he was sleeping. Baldy had about three teeth, no hair and a

wizened complexion that reminded me of the Western film actor Gabby Hayes. He was always very kind to me and would regale me about his exploits when "delving for gold in Canada" He died when I was about ten years old, I think, and not many people noticed his passing. This paragraph may be the sole memorial to his life.

Granny Kennedy's brother Murdoch spent most of his life working as a farm hand on the mainland. He married a woman from the Stirling area that he met on one of the farms he worked on. Her name was Mary, and sometime around the time Grandpa Kennedy died, Murdoch and his wife (known as *Bean Murchaidh*) came back to Tiree and Murdoch helped around Granny's croft. I only remember his widow who taught me to sing "Driving into Glesga in a Soor Mulk Cairt" when I was very small. Murdoch was her second husband and they had no children.

Iain Iain Beag was a couple of years older than me and he has three sisters and a brother. The sisters were called Janet, Mary and Isobel and Mary was a very beautiful girl. The brother's name was *Doneil*. (spelling?) Ian inherited the Farmhouse croft and also took a job at the Reef airport where he was in charge of the ground crew that serviced the airplanes and manned the fire equipment. He was always the first person to welcome me to the island when I came up by air. When my Aunt Annie Kennedy retired from the Balemartine Post Office, his wife took it over in his family house across the road from the Farmhouse in Balemartine.

The third son of *Iain Tuathanach*, Neil, had six children, again all MacKinnons of course: Kate, Annie, Cairsti, Flora, Archibald and Donald. Of these, I knew two: Kate and Cairsti. Kate was known to me as Auntie Huttie and her daughter was Mairi MacKinnon, *Mairi Kate Neill*. Kate also had a son, Captain Neil MacKinnon who was for many years the skipper of the admiralty cruiser that patrolled the Hebrides. His boat often appeared and was moored off Balemartine on the weekend of the Tiree regatta, and I would sometimes get an invitation to go aboard and play with his son Atholl.

I was aboard the fisheries cruiser on the day that Duncan MacArthur (Don) drowned while sailing to the regatta. His son Lachie was with him in the boat and Don's other sons were in another boat down to leeward. We watched helplessly from the fisheries boat as it all happened so quickly.

The daughter Flora married a MacDonald and was the mother of Sarah MacDonald who was the teacher in Balemartine school for many years. I believe that Sarah's brother was Neil MacDonald known as *Niall Skippinis*.

The three sons of *Iain Tuathanach* had, between them, twenty two children (Iain had thirteen of a family). Many of the children and their children moved away from the island (to as far away as New Zealand), but there were also many left and the subsequent generations are spread throughout the island.

Before we leave *Muinntir Tuathanach* I'd like to record some details of Annie Campbell's family She was my Great Granny who was married to *Euan a' Tuathanach*. She was one of eight children. Her sister Flora married a MacLean and lived in Kilmoluaig. Her other sister Bella died when Granny Kennedy was a baby. Her sister Marion had a daughter Bella who was the mother of Erchie Belle who lived up the Balinoe road and whose children Archie, Colin and Ishbel were contemporaries of mine. Archie and Colin died relatively young and Ishbel married Erchie Mor who was Airport Manager at the reef for many years. He died relatively young as well, and Archie Mor and Colin died within days of each other. There was a sister Kate who married a Hunter and lived in Glasgow, a Christina who lived in Balephuil, and brothers John and Duncan. John had a son Murdoch who was a sea captain and whom I knew as a boy. He was known as *Murchadh Iain*. He had retired by the time I knew him and his house was out in front of Ardlui. Granny Kennedy allowed him to keep a vegetable garden in her croft and it was his liquid manure vat that I nearly drowned in as a small boy, but that's another story.

In his later years *Murchadh Iain* married the woman from the house next door who's name was Jemima. I don't know if either of them had children but Murdoch's house was subsequently occupied by a MacLeod couple who were both quite portly and who were known in the district as "The Five by Fives" I have no other knowledge of these Campbells other than what I have recorded here.

A Wartime Premonition.

This incident was told to me by my aunt Ann Kennedy who lived at "Ardlui" in Balinoe with her mother, my grandmother, Christina Kennedy (Cairsti Ghobhainn). My aunt told me the story several times in the 1950's when I was a teenager. I spent summers and Christmas holidays as often as I could and was regaled many times around the fire with her stories.

During World War II, when the island was very busy with airmen and construction workers, it was common for these men to come around the crofts asking to buy farm produce, eggs, butter, or looking for lodgings. One day, my grandmother saw an airman come to the front door and asked her daughter Ann to go and tell him that we were sorry but we didn't have any spare food to offer him. Ann went to the front door but when she got there, there was no one to be seen. She came back in and told her mother that she couldn't find anyone at the door. Her mother told her that she saw him again and asked her to go back again a second time, which she did but with the same result. When her mother told her the third time that she saw the airman, Ann told her mother to go and answer the door herself. Her mother did this and came back from the front door visibly shaken and asked Ann to give her a dram to steady herself but would not say anything else about she saw at the front door.

The following morning Cairsti was out in front of the house feeding the hens when she saw a boy running over to the house from the post office with a yellow telegram envelope in his hand. She took the telegram into the house and handed it unopened to Ann and said "That's Hugh". Ann opened the telegram which explained that her half cousin Hugh MacKinnon of the New Zealand Air Force was missing in action, presumed killed, the previous day. Hugh was the son of Donald and Mary Flora MacKinnon who had emigrated to New Zealand in the 1920's and he was a fighter pilot in North Africa.

Ann asked her mother "How did you know this was about Hugh?" Her mother replied "It was Hugh that I saw at the front door yesterday".