

Coll MacColl (1787-1842): Son of the Manse and Priest in the Highlands of Scotland

This huge draft with no particular destination in mind is, under one aspect, a thank you to John Holliday and John Randall for a splendid 30 May-1 June 2013 conference on the now less Secret Island. While listening with considerable interest to presentations on the history of Tiree, from land-holding to linguistics, I found myself increasingly engaged in a project of my own. Something I never quite believed (the priest's self report, doubted by the late Mgr Roddie MacDonald who passed it on) turned out to be true: Coll MacColl was the son of a minister, specifically the Rev. Archibald MacColl of Tiree. It was good to see that photo of the clergyman's meeting-house so close to where Deirdre and I were staying at the Scarinish Hotel. While waiting to depart with others on the Gott pier I had the location of the old manse explained - now pink, with the unlikely Perthshire name of 'Tullymet' - while looking towards the one which housed the Rev. John Gregorson Campbell and his relatives. I was still getting helpful information from conference folk as the CalMac ferry approached Oban up the Sound of Mull, my only regret that a malfunctioning bagpipe prevented me attempting 'Captain Lachlan McPhail of Tiree' at the ceilidh.

The itinerant Fort Augustus Benedictine Odo Blundell (who kept his ears open for this sort of thing) learned in Morar that Coll MacColl was thirty before he converted to Rome. He reached that age in 1827. My interest stems partly from the fact that Coll was a priest in Bracara, Morar, where we live and he features in two of my academic papers, one published, the other (probably) forthcoming. Extracts from both appear in this disjointed document. But what makes him a particularly attractive figure to me is what a local witness said to Blundell: 'He was a great boy for the fiddle and was oh so greatly loved; but in consequence of an accusation against him he had to go to Australia - the woman who made the accusation lost her arm - it went bad and her cries could be heard five miles away.' There was a woman and he did go to Australia, but otherwise the second part is misleading (no scandal of the usual kind involving celibate priests was ever implied) to say nothing of the same grotesque legend encountered in the sixteenth-century Braes of Mar.

Lack of information partly explains the bad press which Coll has received. Christine Johnson, chronicler of clergy careers, finds him 'at Loch Morar 1832-40. Disappears from clergy lists 1841. Died Australia 1842.' In his *Blessed Morar (Morair Bheannachte)* Paul Galbraith wrote: 'Coll MacColl has been described as a strange character. . . In 1832 he was sent to help [the aged] Ranald MacDonell] in Morar. There is no doubt that he worked diligently, as the first register of the church shows in the number of baptisms

and visitations he made to all the remote communities of North Morar [not to mention South Morar, Loch Arkaig, Knoydart and Loch Quoich]. On the death of Ranald MacDonell in 1840 he took charge of the North Morar Mission, until 1842 when he went to Australia. During his time in Morar he fought violently and publicly with his neighbour, the Vicar General in Arisaig. Bishop Scott thought that Australia was just about the right distance between himself and Coll MacColl! He is recorded as a priest in Australia, but no information is available of where he was located.' The end of this document supplies that information and records Coll's tragically brief three weeks in New South Wales. His sudden death goes far to explain lack of knowledge. Members of the MacColl family went out before him and with him: Grahame Macdonald has already agreed to try and track them down, and Macolm Prentis of Sydney may also have a contribution to make.

I never met the late great Mgr Roddie MacDonald but heard about him from others – in particular Fr Michael Hutson formerly of Morar who said he spoke about Highland priests long departed as if he knew them personally. Father Michael MacDonald of Ardkenneth, South Uist, wrote an obituary of his Morar-born friend in 2004: 'Mgr Roddy had a self-deprecating sense of humour which was an endearing quality. After giving a guided tour of the priests' graves in Morar graveyard a few years before his own death, he turned to his companion and said: "In a hundred years from now others will be walking round this place and, looking at my stone, someone will say - "I wonder who that Roddie Macdonald was!"' One answer would be Vicar General of Argyll and the Isles who was landed with responsibility for the diocese when Bishop Roddie Wright took his leave. Connoisseur of old clergy letters is another, but I must beg to differ from his view of Coll MacColl: 'It appears that he was a simple man who allowed himself to be influenced by his Protestant relatives who stayed with him throughout his time in Morar.' A nephew and then a niece were at Bracara during the latter years (only) but my general objection is that Mgr Roddie sees the Morar priest too much through the disapproving eyes of his vicar general and bishop.

Relevant information about Tiree.

'The Last Catholic on Tiree' appears in John Lorne Campbell's *A Very Civil People* as his translation of a story told by John MacLean of Barra. The least credible part is at the start, with a priest being captured in South Uist (the Irish Franciscan Conchobhair Mac an Bháird - or Cornelius Ward - was welcomed in the 1620s) and cast off to sea at Loch Eynort without oars or food. Coming ashore at the west end of Tiree, he gave the sacraments to an old bedridden man who died two days later. Allan Boyd also pointed me in the direction of two other references – *Clarsach na Coille* and Eric Cregeen - which I plan to consult in Edinburgh next week.

Skipping the bird session, at *An Iodhlann* I learned more about Tiree church history and Janet Bowler copied part of the Rev. MacColl's *Statistical Account*, before John Holliday arrived with a conference group. Lively discussion included comparisons with Bob Hay about the Lismore centre which he helps to run, but I was distracted by Duncan Grant's computer search for the minster's family. Margaret Mackay was taken by my 'great boy for the fiddle' at this point and offered to look things up in Edinburgh. Networking – love it. When I had earlier been introduced to Duncan, Catriona Smyth told me about a memorial stone at Kirkapol to the 'Beloved Minister' and she went back to make a copy of the inscription. After his conference presentation I spoke to Gordon Scott, who handed over the whole of the Rev. Archibald's 1792 description of Tiree along with his own copied pages from *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae* which provides details of Presbyterian ministers' careers and families.

I learned that Archibald MacColl was born at Oban in 1746, educated at Glasgow University, licensed by the Mull Presbytery in 1776 and ordained as a missionary for Tarbert (presumably Loch Fyne) in 1777. He was presented to Tiree by the Duke of Argyll and admitted on 31 August 1780. Five years later he married Flora MacDougall, daughter of Coll MacDougall of Ardincaple House on the island of Seil. No doubt Morar's Coll was named after this grandfather. He was born on 24 July 1787, effectively the oldest son because twins born in the previous year did not survive. Coll was followed by Margaret, Colin, Catherine (who died very young), another Catherine born 1797, Isobel, Donald Flora, Anne, Helen, Janet and Alexander.

Any family history enthusiast (my wife and brother have all the skill I lack) could track these people down and perhaps identify the niece and nephew who lived for a while in Morar. From the *Fasti* entry it appears that Margaret, born 1791, married Tiree man John MacLean of Kilmaluag – one for Duncan Grant? Since Coll's rejection of his father's religious principles is at stake it is worth emphasising that Donald MacColl, born 1799, became minister of Glenorchy and Inishail (an island on Loch Awe) and Janet, born 1897, married Lachlan Mackenzie minister of Jura. Considering that Maighstir Coll's service as a priest in the Highlands was to end with a dispute over ecclesiastical rules on matrimony, it is worth noting that the Rev. Archibald MacColl was rebuked by the Presbytery of Mull 'for celebrating a marriage clandestinely without proclamation of banns or before witness.' Mr MacColl died in 1814. His widow survived him by seventeen years. She was still in life (but where?) when Coll became a priest at Kilcheran in Lismore.

As is usual with these university men, the Rev. Archibald MacColl's contribution to the Old Statistical Account takes the form of a well written account of the island which, along with neighbouring Coll, was his pastoral care. An assistant clergyman lived on the other island. Under such headings as *Soil, Produce, Cultivation, Waters, Mills, &c., Climate, Diseases, Population, &c.*

and *Manufactures and Fishery* he gives a clear impression of how things stood in the 1790s. Under the last of these the minister regrets the lack of wage-earning occupations and the fact that the surrounding banks are mostly fished by Barra boats. MacColl was a Moderate rather than a nineteenth-century Evangelical, of course, and his comments touching on religion are brief enough to quote in full:

'Character and Customs of the People – The common people are not very attentive to the ordinances of religion, but are now reforming as the gentlemen show them a good example. They still retain some Roman Catholic sayings, prayers and oaths, as expletives; such as "*Dias Muire le'*", i.e. God and Mary be with you, "*Air Muire*", swearing by Mary, &c. They are free of superstition, and make a considerable progress in knowledge. There is no schism from the established church; and none of any other persuasion, except now and then a few Roman Catholic servants from Barra. It is a great advantage to their morals that there are only three licensed small stills, and four public houses at the ferries and harbours in both isles. For generations back, there has been no robbery, murder, or suicide. In general they are subtile, and not easily deceived. They are mannerly, lively, and ingenious, very hospitable to strangers, and kind to the distressed. And although it is impossible to answer for the behaviour of all the common people, if left at liberty, the shipwrecked have always found protection and safety from the best families.'

Clearly MacColl liked his flock whether they attended services in the Scarinish meeting-house or not, and they no doubt liked their 'Beloved Minister' in return. Perhaps he too, like his oldest son, played the fiddle for a people 'remarkable for agility. They frequently entertain themselves by composing and singing songs, by repeating Fingalian and other tales, by dancing assemblies at different farms by turns.' An SSPCK teacher of church music had recently been enthusiastically received, so the islanders were generally in good voice. But what are we to make of Fingalian tales and freedom from superstition in the light of what the Rev. John Gregorson Campbell later uncovered in Tiree?

Ronald Black has brought together the collected tales of the man who ministered there for thirty years until 1891 as *The Gaelic Other World*. In it a changeling was driven away from *Hianais* or Hynish by an appeal to Fin's sword (p. 48). It would have been impossible for an island tale-bearer (as distinct from a collector) not to accept the supernatural in Fingalian tales, as when another *Tirisdeach* told the minister of Fin's encounter with the headless body *Colann gun Cheann* which had come across from Morar (277). Hynish (a particular focus of otherworldly terrors) again features when a woman took flight as a gull in order to raise a storm and drown her seducer (183). Witches in the form of cats devoured all but the arms of a boy riding home to Vault behind his father (191); smallpox was foreseen at Caolas in the shape of a

woman with her head 'as black as a pot' (253); a man at Ruaig killed eighty hens with one glance of his evil eye and went on to wreck a big ship of five cross trees (203).

Since Ian Smith made use of it in his presentation on the Balephuill fishing disaster of 1856 (nine drowned, two witnesses inclined to blame the storm on witches) it is appropriate to quote one of the Rev. John Gregorson Campbell's tales in full: 'A fishing boat or skiff belonging to the people of Gortendonald, in the west end of Tiree, was sold because "things" were said to have been seen about it till no one belonging to the village would venture to sea in it. It was bought by some persons in Scarinish (in the east end of the island) who professed not to believe in *taibhsearachd* [Second Sight]. They gave the loan of it to people from Vaul, on the north side of the island. Here sights began again about it, and it was even said that at a time when it was hauled up on dry land, six men were seen rowing in it and one steering.

'At last no one at all would venture to sea in the boat, and it was sent back to Scarinish. So strong was the feeling that the Vaul men would not venture with it through the Black Water (*am Bun Dubh*), as the sound between Coll and Tiree is called, but drew it across land to Gott Loch, where the Scarinish people took it home. After this its odour in the east end of Tiree became so bad that it was sold again to villagers in the west end, at some distance from the place it originally came from. Here it terminated its career in Tiree by drowning six men.' (260)

The Reverend Archibald MacColl's description of Tiree provides a context for Coll growing up, and it is of particular interest that the boy was approaching school age when these social and economic circumstances were being set down. The parish minister referred to the islanders' 'great disadvantages as to education'. Shortly before Coll's birth there were two Tiree schools with rolls in single figures: 'The people had not taste for education, and there were complaints against the teachers.' The SSPCK had since come up with £10 to put alongside the same sum through the parish, and the Duke of Argyll made a further contribution so that free education was available in Tiree and the schools both had between sixty and eighty scholars. Perhaps Coll attended the parish school or perhaps, along with his brothers (and even sisters), he was educated at home. All this gives support to the later charge from a Catholic bishop that he had 'very poor talents' but he did write letters in good English for another bishop. It would be surprising if the oldest son of a minister did not go to university but Coll MacColl did not matriculate at his father's *alma mater* in Glasgow. There is a gap to be filled between Tiree childhood and Lismore adulthood.

Extract from my 'Ordained Lismore: Priests for the Highland District', currently on offer to the Gaelic Society of Inverness.

Soon after Bishop MacDonald came back from another trip to Paris in 1827 he began to confide his loss of sight, describing the state of each eye to John MacDonald of Borrodale who was similarly afflicted: 'One of them is almost shut. The other sees clearer than it did tho' not very well.'¹ After the seminary closed the bishop found himself relying more and more on Coll MacColl, a mature student who, after a brief period at Aquhorties, returned to Lismore.² A convert from Tiree who came to Kilcheran as a gardener, his role there as MacDonald's secretary outraged Bishop Andrew Scott: 'Bishop MacDonald has now got so blind that he cannot sign his own name. . . The last letter I got from him was signed as follows: "For Bishop McDonald, Coll McColl" You may judge whether I can now correspond with him on the confidential affairs of the mission when he has such a secretary as Coll McColl.'³

Worse was to come, with Scott once more condemning MacDonald: 'His ordaining lately McColl has excited a strong sensation among the Brethren throughout Scotland. Everyone knows that no Bishop or Priest can say mass without a special licence from the Pope, unless he can see to read the Missal: neither can he without the same licence administer or confer any Sacrament which requires to see to read, as ordination certainly does.'⁴ A full liturgical explanation followed in a letter to South Uist as to why Coll MacColl, last to be ordained at Lismore, could not validly be regarded as a priest.⁵ He went on to prove himself an active and much loved pastor in Morar but left for Australia after a dispute with William McIntosh.⁶

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- 1 Scottish Catholic Archives, Oban Letters [SCA/OL]. Bishop Ranald MacDonald to Rev. John MacDonald, Borrodale, South Uist, 4 February 1829.
 - 2 Earlier Bishop MacDonald had expressed a wish for Coll MacColl to continue his education at Blairs. SCA/OL. Bishop James Kyle, Preshome near Buckie, to Scott, Greenock, 15 January 1831.
 - 3 SCA/OL. Scott, Glasgow, to Rev. Paul MacPherson, Glenlivet, 21 March 1831. This letter and another of 13 April signed by Coll MacColl for Bishop MacDonald is clear, literate and almost error-free: 'guest' for 'guessed' in the second letter provides a single reminder of the process.
 - 4 SCA/OL. Scott, Glasgow, to Chisholm, Bornish, 24 May 1831. MacColl testified to the presence of Alexander MacDonald as 'the only Clergyman but Bishop MacDonald at my ordination'. SCA/OL. Coll MacColl, Morar, to Bishop Scott, Greenock, 25 May 1838.
 - 5 SCA/OL. Scott to Chisholm, 20 October 1831. Donald MacDonald, who had returned sick from Rome, was present and provided details of what was and was not done in terms of Canon Law.
 - 6 Roberts, 'Changing the practice of religion', 132-7. The dispute between MacColl and his vicar general was over customary betrothal versus modernising rules on marriage.

Extracts from Oban Letters held at the Scottish Catholic Archives, Columba House, 16 Drummond Place, Edinburgh.

OL 1/6/1. Bp Kyle, Preshome, to Bp Scott, Glasgow, 15 Jan 1831. 'The £50 which you mention as bequeathed for the maintenance of Highland boys at Blairs ought undoubtedly be paid to the procurator [Rev. James Sharp, procurator Aquhorties from 1807 and Blairs till his death in 1837]. . . I join with you in thinking that if paid to Bp McD Blairs will never see it. It will be taken to cover part of the money that he advanced for the building or to educate McColl, who if not at Blairs ought, the Bp thinks, to be so.'

OL 1/6/6. Bp Scott, Glasgow, to Rev. John Chisholm, Bornish (South Uist), 24 May 1831. 'There are plenty of letters from him saying he cannot see to read. There is one in which he says he could not administer the Sacrament of Baptism in any other way than Lay Baptism. If he could not see to administer the Sacrament of Baptism, how could he see to administer the Sacrament of Holy Orders which requires a great deal of reading?'

OL 1/6/13. Scott to John Chisholm, South Uist, 20 Oct 1831. 'I thank you most kindly for stating so frankly what you received from Donald McDonald [student returned ill from Rome] relative to Mr McColl's ordination. I do not consider the omission of the Litanies re giving the Deaconship in any way invalidating the ordination. There are however many small ceremonies in giving the Priesthood which are essential, and Bp McDonald could not possibly see whether they were complied with or not. For instance when the Bishop delivers the Paton to the Ordinandus, there must be another bread upon the Paton. In like manner when he delivers the chalice there must be wine in it. You said the Bishop had the pontifical read to him, but did the Bishop repeat himself at the time of the ordination every word that was read to him out of the pontifical? Did Mr Alexr [MacDonald, assistant in Moidart], the only priest present, impose his hands upon McColl's head after the Bishop did it? Did Mr McColl, after the chasuble was unfolded, repeat every word of the Mass even the words of the consecration along with and at the same time as Bp McDonald did it? The ordinatus should have beside him a priest to assist him to do so, and I do not see how Mr Alexr could repeat the words of mass for the Bishop and at the same time assist Mr McColl. If Donald McDonald be still with you, will you ask him some of these questions? The less however that is said about that ordination re presence of others the better in my opinion.'

OL I/23/7. Coll MacCall, Bracara (Morar) to Bishop Scott, Greenock, 9 Feb 1838: 'I have been expecting Mr Stalker [joiner at Morroch, Arisaig] over to put up the four seats wanting [in the new Bracara chapel] and to finish some little

painting on some place or other which he had left undone but he has not as yet come, but having our boat in Arisaig [illeg.] with seven barrels oats & some paint hopes he may come with it or at least that he will send over a few sticks I spoke to him about, & Mr Galbraith [Beoraid farm] has already sent me the other planks requisite. The delay on Mr Stalker's side may be in some measure attributed to myself being so very often called away this winter. But that does not lessen the reflections of such as are not provided with seats, who did not appear for their Interest on the day of letting, but the four if not six new seats will I think silence the most of these complaints to me. . .

'The weather fine tho frosty which has continued now for near five weeks, most intense it is, but not very much snow in the Hills and but very little in the low grounds. People are very much afraid for their Potatoes which are abundant and with us sufficiently sweetened [fertilised?] and we cannot examine them much with the state of the weather. If ours be safe I might escape hanging this year at least, and will have of meal I think what may bring us to the next crop if we can get it made having no horse as yet provided, being disappointed of Col. Gillies [Kinlochmorar] horse which was not Mr McGregor's fault [Fort William lawyer], and the neighbours I am sorry to say getting fewer which cannot be in my favour as you know last year I was much assisted by them.

'Coll's shop [MacDonald kelp factory] at Arisaig is shut & I fear some of our people may be sufferers, but your Lordship will hear more about these matters soon & so we will say little about these distressing topics. There are preparations in the neighbouring countries to this for Van Dieman's Land [Australia]. I hear Mr Cameron Clunis [east of Loch Arkaig near Achnacarry] who is to send out his son (i.e. Mr Reginald's nephew) has got a list of 200 persons said to be preparing for that Colony. They have sent Mr Reginald [MacDonell, aged senior priest at Bracara] the usual allowance of £15. This business of Drumnantoran [?] has done much mischief. We have had Lord Lovate's Factor McRae lately and I hear he has had a good [rent] Collection – the fishing did some service. Lady Lovate has sent us a Sutan at which I am very happy. . .

'Might I not mention to [Mr McSween, Strathglass priest for Lovat estate above Beaully] that some of small Tenants shd change places as I can not get a few of them [illeg.] peaceable but poor things casting up old sores to one another & otherwise disagreeing. Ld Lovate mismanages his noting concerns here & so I believe do the Whigs of this [Inverness-shire] county generally. My business with such things is but little. I have more to do otherwise than I can well do but I regret it, and I consider these notes to be a curse to poor Highlanders. They ought to be at £10 [illeg.] . . .

'Since I had the honour of writing to your Lordship last Mr McDonald Finiskaig [head of Loch Nevis] died [who] was promising you aid to the [Tarbert] Chapel. I remember his saying he intended doing so with yourself –

he would be a support to me. His two Brothers have submitted their affairs to arbitration, there being an other Brother in Glasgow as well as the Brother in part possession at Finiskaig, the one in Glasgow being the elder.

'I trust to make my poor sisters [five possibles apart from Isobel married to Jura minister] known to your Lordship, but for fear of prejudices I must take some time. My Nephew whom you saw tells me one of them will be to see me, God grant it, & he wishes me to take a sister of his likewise [apparently Isabella, at Bracara in 1841]. I trust good things wil come to me.'

'P.S. I paid Mr Stalker 15/- when I mentioned in my letter to your Lordship & I have paid the lambs to £4 except what we got in a present from the [MacDonald] Rhue [Arisaig] family being 14 from Dr Coll [Dalilea, Moidart] & Mr Stewart [Kinlochmoidart] which Miss Jane Rhue made them send me. The House keeping is the [illeg.]. Mrs Chisholm Cape George Nova Scotia orders £5 for Mr Reginald & the same to me. She is the elder sister of Col. Gillies. But no payments can be well made by Mr McGregor till we hear from my correspondent through Bishop McDonell Upper Canada an other sister's son. I write him the second time today but the affairs of that Colony might have prevented me having an answer to my first commun-ication ere now. I trust to hear from your Lordship soon & that your health continues unimpaired. I have not been much to Arisaig for some time. Will your Lordship inform me if you may have occasion to be in Edinburgh during the spring or when, as I might have something to go there which we spoke of some time since. Wood Cutters and Bark peelers [tannin for fishing nets] what am I to do with them unless I exact payment in Confession & give to the owners etc. They allow an Inn at Tarbert at the Chapel there.'

OL 1/24/7. Coll to Scott 25 May 1838: 'I was aware that your Lordship was told of the severe accident which befell me in Knoydart when on a visit to see Mr Neil [MacDonald] in time of that frost on which I fell and broke my collar bone which was I believe well enough set by a Blacksmith from Skye when the Doctor who resides in Sleit [Sleat peninsula, Skye] did not come to my relief tho sent for by Mr Neil and myself. In this way I remained with my broken collar bone for the period of six days till that Smith came at last and I believe set it well enough, but it gave way two days threafterand consequently there is a lump on it near the size of a small hen egg but thank God so much recovered that for the last four Sundays I have been able to officiate, and said the first Mass after the accident at Dallela [Moidart], where I was so well taken care of that my health otherwise was much improved tho I was too long of going there for Doctor Coll [MacDonald, Dalilea] to set the bone again, who said it formed a knot that it would be in vain to attempt altering it, so I am to be content with it as it is & the Doctor said nature had done a great deal for me, but still I feel some uneasiness in it, but can raise my arm high enough.

'Had Doctor Coll put a hand [operated] on it, I intended before [his] doing so to have written your Lordship to provide for Morar an efficient Clergyman during the time I must have required before the hand could be made use of should I have undergone a new operation. But in this respect Morar was so very fortunate that my friend Mr Angus [MacDonald, retired sick from Arisaig and living nearby with his widowed mother at Kinloid] who has gone to Badenoch officiated here I think at least every second Sunday during my inefficiency. In his health Mr Angus has been better than I have seen for some years back this last spring. As to other [drink-related?] remarks of your Lordship in respect to him [he] says I should be aware of myself. But what a nice Gaelic preacher Mr Angus is. I know few who can put a Discourse together better in that Language.

'As to my Nephew he does not intend coming here [as] he is in Glasgow in a shop. But my youngest Sister [Janet born 2 June 1807] tells by letter received three or four days since that she is determined to see Morar soon, and her stay may be long or short as she may conduct herself in it & if she should be inclined to become a Catholic which I trust she may it is not unlikely that she might save me one Servant but we will say very little till we see. I have a Brother in your close neighbourhood for many years labouring under mental derangement his name Colin [born 6 July 1793] & resides in Mr Thomson's Asylum in the Glen [Hillend Lunatic Asylum] I wish your Lordship saw him. But in this as well as as other things relative to my Relations I would say little being in hopes that we may see your Lordship to these countries this season which I hope we may.

'As to Mr Stalker's first Acct it was paid at Martinmas as I promised but [for] 15/-; since, he has given another coat of paint to the windows & put up six new seats for which last job he has not as yet demanded payment. I hope you will relieve me from that obligation of keeping sprits constantly in the House on Acct of Mr Rd & lessen the Board by the £3 instead of it. He can if he likes buy it for himself. He is in the usual health.

'P.S. I hear there is to be a sale of Mr Galbraith's stock etc. on Thursday first the 31 Curt, but I have no other country news worth mentioning & I am sorry I have this same to mention. I trust God will reward Dr Coll & the family of Rhue all of them for their attentions to me but more particularly for the last treatment of me in my sickness. It showed a strong instance of Charity and goodness of heart. I am [illeg.] to pay Mr Galbraith £11 I owe him by taking it in Mr Ranald's [as Reginald above] next half year's board he being indebted to Mr R £14 for the cows &c or pay my debt to the creditors which would be hard for Mr Ranald, but I am afraid the creditors of Mr G would find it out but perhaps they would say little about it after all. I never thought it was good to have taken Buorplach [Bourblach, North Morar, at estuary] & the other farms, he should have been content with Beorait itself [Beoraid farm was divided into seven crofts in 1880]. Col. Gillies's house at at

Kinloch[morar] was burnt to the ground when I was at Dallela. Corrychoile [John Cameron, Lochaber drover from near Spean Bridge] has taken Kinloch and Camerons lands.

OL 1/25/6. Coll to Scott 10 July 1838: 'Such weather as we have had since Friday last [five days ago] we have seldom seen the like with continued rain except on Sunday forenoon which was as much of dry weather as as enabled the people to come to Prayers; the whole of the flat part of the country from Arisaig to Lochmorar I may say is one lake and the rain continues with very little abatement. I fear the damage to the country must be very great, especially if the rain does not cease of which it has very little appearance at this moment. . . [see 'William Mackintosh']

'Where is Mr Neil [MacDonald, Knoydart priest] since he left Fortwilliam? I suppose still in Glasgow till the meeting of the Friendly society [clergy finances] be over. There is nothing better for his health than going about for a while provided the Purse be well filled. I was one Sunday since he went away at the Strath of Knoydart [Inverie], where our own people can easily in any thing of good weather attend as well as the Knoydart people themselves & I intend please God being there also Sunday first, only I should have asked sooner for your Lordship's doing so tho I know Mr Neil himself is wishful I should do so. Send me then your concurrence in so doing for the time to come suppose Mr N should [not?] be home himself for Sunday come a week when I of course will be relieved.

'I did not apply this year for aid to the Friendly society though your Lordship will easily understand how much my broken shoulder put me back in my arrears. But from what I hear & that from people who should know that the incumbents of Eigg, Glengarry and Badenoch ought to be the first to be considered & might I not say Fortwilliam likewise. I was at Glencoe tother day and the Chapel & house there [Brecklet, Ballachulish] please me much. Many of the people there & Balihoolish are my acquaintances, and being to wait at Fortwilliam idle for Mr McGregor regarding Col Gillies' affairs I thought I could employ the vacant time no better than seeing Mr [Charles, FW and Glencoe 1832-9] McKenzie (whose health is better than I have seen him for some time) & the Chapel, more especially as I had the little pony which I bought at Sleit for the spring work.

'I got from Mr McGregor a few pounds for the people here, but many of there [sic] claims are prescribed. However I will not pass the matter over with such a Plea as that of Prescription [latent damage in Scots Law] without once more at least writing the Heirs of Col Gillies in America who have corresponded with me already, & also with the Bps McDonell [Upper Canada] & Fraser [Nova Scotia] making the strongest remonstrances in favor of the people who have numerous small claims, so situated, & I believe we

may thank [ironic] the Dawsons of Cross [Glenancross farm, South Morar] for bringing about their Plea of Prescription.

'Mr [Angus] McDonald Glenalladale sent me enclosed £19 10s without mentioning any thing about the division of it, & as Mr Reginald and I are near about square at last Term of Whitsunday I have left the letter containing the money with Mr R himself till we have the favor of seeing your Lordship or your advice in respect to it. I must however be under the necessity of borrowing a part of it that belongs to Mr R after we see yourself which I hope will be soon, so as to have your advice & counsel about many things.

'In reference to your Lordship's last letter I had no communication with my dear friend Mr Alexr [MacDonald, dismissed from Moidart – see my 'Whisky and priests in the Highlands'] in the way of confession being well aware in his case he must be put into the hands of his Bishop [Scott] which I trust before now he has done, as I hear he has left the country [Moidart] surely with that intention, and trusting that he will be well yet. Tho I absolutely approve of the Theological part of your Letter yet I must remark that Mr Alexr's case is one of those rare cases in respect to his constitution of which your Lordship is not aware. It galls me if Bishop Ranald has been found fault with for giving me ordination, however he had his Penance in different ways before his death & if my Prayers [masses for the dead] were not valuable for him in the sight of Almighty God they were not few. We shall please God speak on this subject.

'Before I fill up this space I must ask your Lordship if you approved of the Proprietor of Lochalsh sending Bibles to the people here as is alleged. Without knowing this I have altogether disapproved of the people accepting them in my absence at Fortwilliam (without losing a Sunday) and told them to send them back or burn them for tho they will not lose their Religion by the many errors of that Translation of part of the [Lord's?] tunes yet they will inevitably acquire the Twang and Cant of the Baptists and Anabaptists of the Highlands much owing to that half HibernoScotian translation particularly of the N.T. [see my 2005 *TGSI* paper 'Maighstir Eobhan Mac Eachainn and the orthography of Scots Gaelic']. Should your Lordship have good reason for not prohibiting the use of this late version differing [only?] a little from the [SSPCK] Society's former Edition yet I will await your reply before proceeding further in the matter.

'I did not recollect your directions regarding the money received from Glenaladale until I wrote the above but it may remain as I said till we hear from you or rather see your Lordship. I am sorry for the Galbraiths but as you state it could not be Mr Galbraiths fault. There are dubious transactions between the Brothers. Mrs Galbraith should have had Beorachbeg [Beoraid Beag] during her life time but people are not often candid in proper [time?]. I would have gone 60 miles [Scots miles Fort William and back?] to have

continued her there. Mrs Coll Inch [near Roybridge] has taken Beorait etc. & Corrychoile Kenloch and Camerons Farm lands [illeg.].

'I expect my sister [Janet] on a visit, perhaps she will call if your Lordship be at home that is if [conveniency?] will admit of her so doing. My kind compliments to Mr Smith [Alexander, sharing Greenock chapel-house with Scott 1835-42].

OL 1/25/12. William McIntosh, Vicar General at Arisaig, to Scott, 30 July 1838: 'You must too establish some regulations to be observed on proclamation of Banns when the parties belong to two parishes. And what is your opinion of this case? When I was in Barra, a couple were proclaimed at Arisaig by Mr [Ranald, Moidart] Rankin the Sunday before I came home, and he refused to marry them till I would come home and proclaim them a second time at least; but my good people [groom's side from Keppoch, Arisaig] set off the Tuesday following and got married [at the bride's home, Swansletter on the border with South Morar] by Mr Ranald Morar without any line from Mr Rankin that no opposition had been offered. I do not question the validity of the marriage, owing to his dotage [aged about eighty-four] yet I have some doubts whther he heard their confessions.' For much more on marriage see 'William McIntosh' below.

OL 1/27/18. Coll, Arisaig, to Scott, 27 March 1839: 'I am sorry of the subject that I must trouble your Lordship with writing at this time. That unfortunate claim of the £10 by Mr Allan MacDougall W.S. Edinburgh coming like a thunder bolt upon me made up to an immense sum of £40 has made my life miserable for some time back, add to that a severe attack of sickness I had been seized with in Boradale [Angus MacDonald's Arisaig home – sickness a premonitory heart attack] where I had come over to write on this unfortunate business. I hope your Lordship will concur with me in claiming for the benefit of the Mission of Morar what sheep were given in to me for the benefit of either myself or the Mission for it would be a great loss to the place to take off these sheep any move being so far domesticated to the place, and as for me my happiness in the place seems to be at an end other wise I was beginning to be happier in it than any other place and very suitable to a person of my habits and disposition. Now it is more than probable that with your concurrence I must betake myself elsewhere, where I may have a better chance among the natives or convicts of Australia if I escape being taken by the neck.

'I have however written to Mr MacDougall for his ultimatum re the case by offering to pay him £20 rather than make things more public until I hear further I am at a loss how to behave. One of my own Parishioners will I think come forward to do this much for me. As to my speaking of Australia I am resolved with your Lordship's concurrence to endeavour to procure a

passage from Dr Boyter [government emigration agent for Australia, at Fort William form 8 May 1838] and I have had serious thought on the subject before this affair which I supposed could have been easily settled came to this length. My reasons for it are that I have reason to think my sisters would accompany me and give them a better chance of every thing & they seem willing themselves.

'And besides when Mr MacRae [factor] was collecting Lord Lovate's Rent he said that they wanted to get so many (I don't know how many) of the Morar people off to that Colony of which we receive good accounts by private letters to the [Morar] Country and I find that many of the people themselves would emigrate they being this year very scarce of Potatoes & other Provisions for their Families, tho I am happy to say that they made a good effort to pay Lovate owing to the Herring fishing. Now this being the case would not your Lordship allow me to go with them if so be that Lord Lovate interests himself to provide a passage for the people, & also perhaps the people of Knoydart who are warned out might be put off also, who themselves I hear are disposed to go to Australia. In the circumstances I hope your Lordship will approve of what I have said and that by so doing you will get quite [quit] of me for whom you have done so much and who may be the means of troubling you more than he certainly could wish & you may believe would be more disposed to assist your Lordship than give you trouble. In hopes of an answer I have the honour to be your Lordship's most obedient servant.' This clear – deferential but confident - letter ends early with no attempt to 'fill up this space'.

OL 1/28/2. Coll, Beoraidbeg, to Scott, 4 April 1839: 'Lord Bishop, I am just this moment favoured by a letter from Mr MacDougall restricting his claim to £20 instead of £40, and I am promised the loan of £20 near hand me from Mr McDonald Finiskaig so my Lord I am now relieved of much anxiety, & I am sure your Lordship will participate with me. I wrote with Glenaladale's assistance somewhat of a smart Letter to Mr MacDougall & the answer has been accordingly as I have said. I send this after Mr Galbraith to Arisaig who is disappointed of the steamboat today but she is expected to be back from Portree tomorrow. I have just about half an hour observed her passing Northward.

'I am just now after reading Dr Boyter's answer to the application from these countries, and am happy to say that it is favorable and that the Dr says he is to be to Arisaig after he comes to Tobermory and that he will give a passage to such as he sees eligible. The application for passage to NSW [New South Wales] was sent off a few days ago from Arisaig by Glenaladale [and?] Dr [John, Roshven] McEachan (who goes himself to Halifax [Nova Scotia] in course of this summer) and answer has been without losing a post to Dr McEachan as I have said which is most lucky, the poor people being very

scarce this year. The bearer will inform your Lordship that many of my Parishioners have signed for Australia & that many more intend doing so, & in that case I trust your Lordship will part with me in preference to any other Clergyman in the event my dear Sisters will accompany me & I have wrote them by Dr Galbraith to that purpose who will let your Lordship know the result on his return from Glasgow.

'I am not very stout but better thank God than when I had the violent shock at Borrodale but still faint at heart which Mr Galbraith will tell your Lordship. I am forwarding [figures about?] the improvement of the [Bracarina] Farm as usual for which I beg to refer your Lordship to the bearer & I remain in haste etc.'

OL 1/28/7. McKintosh to Scott, 30 April 1839: 'I saw your letter to Mr Coll about Australia. But why refer him to me? I consider him quite unfit for such an undertaking. For officiating in a town he is entre nous too simple and unpolished, and a range of 100 miles in the country is too much for his physical strength. Besides he has not energy of mind to put any effectual stop to the prevailing habits [drink?] of the inhabitants. He wants acuteness to penetrate and unfold the subtle sophistry with which worldly minded men would defend many dangerous habits and customs rendered apparently allowable by being so long inured to them [wider local culture?]. He is just fit for the place he is in and nothing more, neither can he be wanted [spared] there at present whatever may be done through time, I do not therefore see the use of holding out any encouragement to him to apply to Mr Boyter. However I would like to hear from you on this subject at your earliest convenience.'

OL 1/29/15. Dr Coll MacDonald, Dalilea, Moidart, to Scott, 22 Dec. 1839: 'I should like very much to superintend the Canadian Highland emigration, and feel convinced that Bishop [Alexander, Upper Canada] MacDonell would bring it about while in London if your Lordship would please to write to him. It is a troublesome business, but surely a Highlander is better adapted to the business than my friend Dr Boyter who has not a word of Gaelic. I really think it would benefit those who go and those who remain, for there are too many people in various parts. In the Parish of Sleat in a population of 3000 1200 have no land, but subsist as they best may. The Parish of Glenelg is worse. In Morar North there are several hundreds without land, also in Knoydart, the Isles &c. I think it a philanthropic duty to send them to possess good land. I think religion is not averse to the duty. Even if compulsion is necessary, which it will be. I wrote to Bishop MacDonell on the subject but did not know his address and suppose the letter miscarried.'

OL 1/30/6. *McKintosh to Scott, 22 January 1840*: 'After getting over the Christmas confessions, I am so much engaged attending sick calls from the virulence of the measles that are overrunning the country like a conflagration, that I have only now got time to bid you a good new year and many happy returns. . . The weather is so boisterous that I cannot budge from home to see what is going on in the wide range of my Vicariate. I was a good deal vexed at Mr McColl last week. He went to Moydart last Friday-week; and what, do you think, was his errand? To hear Mr Alexr's confession. Yes for this a man was sent express from Moydart, and for this mighty important affair Mr Coll left his people without Mass that Sunday. I do not know whether to admire more the impudence of the one or the silliness of the other. When clergymen are capable of acting so preposterously and contrary to the dictates of the plainest and most ordinary common sense, it is difficult to guide them. Being the first time, I did not reprove him by way of chastisement, but I told him plainly and firmly his duty and the utter insufficiency of his reason for going at the latter end of the week, and even for going at all, when Mr Alexr had nothing to do than come to him. Yet I am afraid that his feelings are so blunt that a gentle reprimand will make no impression upon him.' Alexander MacDonald was at Eilean Shona, Moidart, in the house at Bailly of Archie Rhu MacDonald's mother. He was undergoing a trial year of abstinence in hope of being accepted by Bishop Kyle of the Northern District. Perhaps Coll was storm-bound and unable to return on the Saturday as intended.

OL 1/33/3. *McKintosh to Scott, 10 Nov. 1840*: 'Poor Mr Ranald fell into the fire two days ago and burned his hands severely and cut his face, so that he is in a dangerous way. Mr McColl sent for Dr McCallum [from Sleat?] this afternoon and I am going to see him tomorrow.' Mr Ranald died at Bracarina on Christmas Dag, having served Morar for sixty years. Coll was now in full charge of the mission. At the 1841 census he and his niece Isabella shared the house with three female servants. One, Isabella MacDonell whose age is rounded up or down to 75, may have been kin to the old priest and keeping house for him. As far as the record begun in 1833 shows, the majority of early marriages were conducted (at the home of the bride) by the old priest though Coll took in some fairly distant ones at Meoble, Stoule and Finiskaig. By 1836, when a page to 1840 is missing, Coll was conducting most of the marriages. No doubt he was responsible for baptising in places as remote as Loch Quoich.

OL 1/34/10. *McKintosh to Scott, 18 Feb. 1841*: 'A case has occurred which gives me considerable uneasiness and I therefore thought it proper to consult your Lordship and have the assistance of your advice how to proceed or perhaps I should rather say have your decision on the subject so as to lessen my responsibility.

'A couple contracted in Morar and before the banns were proclaimed a lad in Bracara objected on the plea of a previous but private promise. Mr Coll now, goaded on by his nephew, keenly espoused the cause of the disappointed suitor and insisted, without a shadow of proof, that a valid promise had been given. Mr Coll in consequence did not proclaim them the first Sunday following the contract. Mr [Archibald, FW 1839-46] Chisholm from Fortwilliam was here at the time and we both went over but to no purpose; Mr Coll was as obstinate as he was unreasonable and illogical; and the Bracara lad refused to submit his case to us unless we took his own oath, nor would he give his obligation in writing that he would abide by our decision. We then forced a kind of arrangement upon Mr Coll namely that he would proclaim the parties next Sunday and I would marry them on his giving lines to this effect that the objection was not supported by proof and therefore considered vexatious. But as I clearly foresaw, we no sooner left him than he [illeg.] and did not proclaim them. . .

McIntosh's 2,000-word account of events before and after he married the couple, she from Stoule, North Morar, and he from Ardnish in the Braes of Arisaig, is summarised quite fully in the 'William McIntosh' paper. If only to obtain a better sense of Coll's position on the claims of his altar-serving fellow traveller, it is worth quoting from what he provided on command. This may be prefaced by McIntosh's observation: 'The inclosed lines do not seem to me to breathe a proper spirit. He seems reckless of the consequences provided the lad get his revenge. He has the air of one that was playing into the other man's hands. The poor man does not perceive that he has all along been patronising a person that insulted him in the very outset by refusing his arbitration, yes hugging to his bosom a viper that would out of pure revenge bring revenge upon that church of which he is a member by doing what in him lies to stir up the Kirk to insist upon her legal, but here unprecedented, right of having all proclamations made at the parish churches.' Banns had been proclaimed once (only, as was customary in North Morar) in each of the Catholic churches - in the case of McIntosh's Arisaig because the facts were widely known and Lent (when no marriage could take place) was near.

Coll's 'lines' follow: 'The bearer Ann McLellan having called upon me for certificate of character and marriage I have nothing to say against the character of the girl excepting that I consider her under promise of marriage to another and considering also that promise as not taken out of the way as yet - under such circumstances I do not consider myself authorised to to celebrate said marriage more especially as they have applied to another clergyman to do so already.

'And also understanding from the party aggrieved in this case that they have [he has?] applied for redress to the laws of the Scottish Kirk I shall not in

any ways participate either in their guilt [the couple married by McIntosh] or legal proceedings nor would I advise a brother clergyman to interfere as far as I can judge. I also have to say regarding the celebration of this marriage that they have not been three times proclaimed either in my chapel nor in the Parish Kirk so that upon the whole of these considerations I wash my hands out of this case.

'Morar Feby. 17th 1841 (Signed) Coll MacColl Miss[ionarius] Ap[ostolicus]'

OL/1/24/18. McKintosh to Scott, 9 Mar. 1841: 'On returning from Eigge this afternoon I was informed by common report that Mr Coll told the congregation last Sunday that he had no longer charge of the mission of N. Morar; that he was without a church and without a home; that he would officiate only next Sunday for the public, but would say mass privately for himself; that he would in the meantime attend to sick calls and if any came to confession he would receive them. I anticipated that his nephew would advise him to throw up his commission in disgust at the indignant treatment, as he thought, he was subjected to.

'I would gladly go over and advise him to resume his functions, were it not that the tenor of your letter shewed that you would have no objections to him suspending himself, although you would prefer his having done so, with a better grace, by his having sent you his written resignation of his spiritual charge and that he only held his office in trust till you would have time to provide a successor. Should he persist in his present intention the parish must be served by the neighbouring clergymen during its vacancy.'

OL 1/34/19. McIntosh to Scott, 11 Mar. 1841: 'Wonders will never cease. Mr Coll came here this afternoon and made his humble submission, and to make his apology [to Ann MacLellan?] Sunday first in the form dictated by me. I have not seen Glenaladale since, but I suspect he has the merit of Mr Coll's conversion.

'You require no comments from me on this ecclesiastical farce, or rather clerical tragedy, for I thin I said in my last that Mr Coll concluded by suspending himself ecclesiastice.'

OL 1/36/11. McIntosh to Scott, 15 July 1841: 'As I promised to Mr Coll I went to Bracara on Friday last but as the sheep were not all collected I got that day passed over without coming to close quarters. He was then to come to Arisaig on Monday but did not come till yesterday. He brought a detailed account of the prices he set upon sheep, cattle & leaving the crops and furniture to be valued by appraisers mutually chosen. I had now to give a definite answer so I told him that his prices were too high, but that I would take the sheep as two men would value them, and as for the cattle and

furniture that I would not take them at all, because he had not winter feed for the former and the latter was so inferior in quality that his successor would not choose to use them any longer than he could procure better. He has not hay and his corn is light, so that he will not have fodder for above half his stock of black cattle. And his whole crop being light it is difficult to value it low enough. When I asked him why he did not sell his stock of milk cows at Whitsunday when they were marketable, he told me he had in view to dispose of them all at once. So you see he has been concocting his plan for some time. He has as many manoeuvres as an old horse jockey. Although he said before that he would sooner leave them all than lose the opportunity he had in view, when he saw I would not take all off his hand he said that if he did not get his own price he would keep all till next Whitsunday as we could not remove him sooner. He was to set out today for Beaufort on a visit of a fortnight to Lord Lovat so that he will be absent two Sundays perhaps three. I did not say a word for or against his motions, I gave him free scope to follow his own whims. Nor do I see any necessity for writing to the Factor. However I will see Glenaladale tomorrow and perhaps he may write. Mr Coll wished me to keep all this a profound secret, but I find that the whole affair and more than he deigned to tell me is ding dang through the country.

OL 1/36/14. McKintosh to Scott, 27 July 1841: 'Mr Coll called here to day after returning from Beaufort and tendered me his stock at valuation which I refused until I had your orders to do so. Glenaladale and I advised him to make a roup to which he has consented on condition that the roup will be stopped should your Lordship wish to have the stock at valuation. In this I cannot advise you, particularly unless you have a clergyman ready to take charge of the farm and stock. To appoint servants to take care of all, with scanty provender, would be ruinous. The roup will take place on the 10th Augt. And I would require to have your instructions by Saturday the 7th Augt. at furthest. If the mission is to be served for some time by the neighbouring clergymen the Priest could board for a day & night occasionally with Mr Galbraith much cheaper than keeping up an establishment there [Bracarina] even on the smallest scale. The ground could be partly sown and partly let for one spring with very little expence. And take in hogs for wintering. Were I to succeed Mr Coll [purely hypothetical] I would prefer that to taking upon my shoulders from 150 to £200 to be discharged in the course of 20 years off that unproductive soil. At most I would not buy but a few of the sheep and a cow or two if the most fitting for your plan.

'The next question is, how is the mission to be served? Mr Coll leaves about the end of August. If Mr Niel [MacDonald, Knoydart] would attend once every month at Invereye and Tarbert alternately [main Knoydart mass at Samadhlan on the west coast], Mr [Donald, Eigg and Canna] McKay and I could go to Bracara once every five or six weeks and Mr [Ranald, Moidart]

Rankin could relieve me occasionally in the Braes of Arisaig [Ardrnish] say once every 8 weeks. Or send Mr Angus [MacDonald, Badenoch?] there [to Bracara] for some time till you can make a better arrangement.

'I still think Mr McKay would do well in the small mission of N. Morar [faint praise], could you but supply his [Small Isles] place from another quarter. I hear Mr Allan McLean [under supervision in South Uist for drinking] is at present in Moydart, would he not do in Eigg were he to take the pledge, where he has or rather would have no temporalities [church property] to look after and where they are all Teetotallers made to his hand. These my Lord are all suggestions which you may throw in the fire if you have already made or planned a different arrangement.' Donald McKay succeeded Coll to begin his '28 anxious years spent at Bracara' and Alexander Gillis was transferred from Glengarry to the Small Isles mission which he served very loyally from Cleadale, Eigg, for thirty-eight years.

OL 1/37/3. Scott to John Chisholm, South Uist, 11 August 1841: 'Mr McColl at North Morar, without ever speaking to me on the subject, has taken a freak of throwing up his Mission and of going to Australia, because some of his relations are already there and the rest of them are preparing to go. The roup of his effects was to have taken place this week. I saw him at Arisaig in the end of June. He mentioned nothing about his [intentions?] at that time to me, nor has he ever since written a scrap [scrape] of a pen to me. I have no person to supply his place till next year.'

OL 1/37/4. McKintosh to Scott, 26 Aug. 1841: 'Mr McColl's roup took place a week sooner than he at first intended and I took nothing but a few shillings worth. I am very glad I did not take even the sheep at valuation for they were inferior and would be a losing concern. . .

'I have nothing particular to say about the N. Morar Mission except that I have some doubts of Mr Niel's coming to officiate at Tarbet every three weeks or even monthly. However we shall soon see. Mr Coll himself will give you all his news. I had a great tug to get the chalice and Missal belonging to Tarbet chapel from him. He carried them and an old suit of vestments as far as Arisaig. And he has some hankering after the Vestments sent by Lady Lovat, he is not sure but they may be a personal present. But you need not let on I said any thing about these matters. I promised to send them after him if you consented to their removal. I thought this arrangement better than that he should return them from Greenock if he found you refractory.'

OL 1/38/2. McKintosh to Scott, 9 January 1842, under requested lists of Easter communicants, baptisms and converts for the mainland Rough Bounds plus Eigg: 'You will notice that Knoydart [350 Easter communicants]and North Morar

[230] are partly guess work, for the number of Com^{ts} given by Mr Niel was only 270 and I added 80 more for the number I thought Mr Coll might have had in the Braes of Knoydart [upper Loch Nevis?], for it was he who received them at Easter. The same is to be said of the Baptisms from these two parishes [Knoydart 17, N. Morar 14]. . .

'I am every day more and more convinced that if any thing will save the Highland lay and clerical the [teetotal] pledge is the thing, and for that very reason I am afraid that Mr Rankin must sooner or later remove from Moydart [Ranald Rankin's repeated request to follow Moidart's emigrants to Australia was not granted until 1855], and I suppose that Mr McKay is the fittest person for N. Morar. He has been so far successful there already.' A key change after Coll left was that all marriages conducted by Donald McKay took place in the Bracara chapel.

OL 1/38/8. McKintosh to Scott, 22 Feb. 1842, in answer to queries about the above: 'Mr Coll kept a register of children baptised in his own parish, and that register including the number baptised since Mr Coll's departure has just 13 baptisms during the year 1841. But Mr Coll baptised many children in Mr Niel's [Knoydart] parish & that number is taken, as I told you by proportioning the baptisms to the population for this year only, as there was no means of getting at the exact number without delaying the lists too long. Mr Coll baptised children on Loch Airkeag which belongs to Mr [Donald, Roybridge 1826-72] Forbes Braes of Lochaber, so you see Mr Coll's high number of baptisms can easily be accounted for. . .

'I may get oats and grass seed sown in Bracara, but I am so busy with my own farm, as I am preparing for flitting at Whitsunday and consequently making as much crop as possible, that I cannot spare either men or horses to make potatoe crop there, and to hire people to do every thing without me to look sharply after them would be worse and more expensive than buying potatoes. But if Mr McKay were given to uderstand that he was designed for that mission, he might stay there two or three weeks and give the people their Easter duties and do with the farm what he thought best. Perhaps Mr Galbraith would take charge of the workmen but I know it would be at an enormous expence. You have some experience what it is to bring sea ware or any other heavy commodity past the water fall on the river Morar.'

Extracts from my 'William McIntosh in the West Highlands: changing the practice of religion', *Innes Review*, 54 (2003), 111-41.

Two other clergymen merit a place in this *Dramatis Personae*. Donald McKay returned to Eigg from Rome's Propaganda College and earned McIntosh's approval by taking the teetotaler's pledge, inducing most island Catholics to follow him. McKay's last years in Morar were nevertheless marked by a

running dispute: 'Mr McIntosh at Arisaig has . . . been all along prejudiced against me.'⁷ Coll MacColl was in Morar before him. A convert, gardener⁸ and late vocation from Tiree, he was ordained at Lismore after a shortened preparation. The under-educated MacColl came to share the new Lovat chapel-house at Bracara with an old priest, Ranald MacDonald, who could no longer visit the scattered homes of his mission. The Morar register shows MacColl's willingness to take the sacraments - and something more - as far as Loch Quoich: 'He was a great boy for the fiddle and was oh so greatly loved.'⁹ MacColl left after quarrelling over clerical jurisdiction with his vicar general: 'I saw your letter to Mr Coll about Australia. But why refer him to me? I consider him quite unfit for such an undertaking. . . He is just fit for the place he is in and nothing more.'¹⁰

Bishop Scott, who generally made the vicar general's views his own, also met the clergy on his visitations from Greenock.¹¹ When the question arose of sending someone to the Scots Benedictine monastery at Ratisbon in South Germany, Scott (though hardly oversupplied with manpower) offered Bishop Kyle a choice of four priests:

I could spare Mr McLean who came home from Spain about four years ago. I could also spare Mr McColl and little Mr Angus if any of them were willing to go, though I have no person at present to supply any of their places. McColl has very poor talents but he is correct in his conduct and would be all obedience.

Prior to the 1849 completion of St Mary's, Arisaig, Catholics gathered in a chapel which Clanranald trustees had paid for at the start of the century. Threatened with change of use by an heir who gambled away a kelp fortune and sold off his lands, McIntosh considered it ripe for demolition.¹² Every

7 GAA. Donald McKay, Drimnin, to Eyre, 15 Aug. 1871. McKay said that McIntosh lacked judgement, 'being now an old priest,' but the correspondence suggests otherwise.

8 Mgr Roddie MacDonald, personal communication 31 Mar. 2000. According to MacColl's own account he was 'the son of a Protestant minister . . . [and] for several years the chaplain and intimate friend of the late Bishop Macdonald of the Highland District.' *Australasian Chronicle*, 1 Feb. 1842.

9 Blundell, *Catholic Highlands*, ii, 115. A typescript of the Morar register of baptisms and marriages is held in Mallaig Heritage Centre.

10 McIntosh, 30 April 1839.

11 Scott reached Fort Augustus in November 1838 to find that the young priest Donald Walker had died four days before. His chapel was so ruinous that the congregation virtually worshipped 'in the open air'. *Catholic Directory for Scotland* (Edinburgh 1836) 54. Scott later opened a chapel designed by Kyle with a structure 'considered necessary in the Highlands and that is a peat house'. Scott to Kyle, Preshome, 9 Nov. 1837.

12 Scott to Kyle, 15 Sept 1838. It is still in use, facing the other way, as Arisaig's kirk. MacDonald of Clanranald had £20,000 a year when sales began about 1811. MacDonald,

third Sunday he conducted a service ten miles away at Polnish in the Braes of Arisaig, otherwise the Ardnish peninsula. McIntosh rode there, but was leaving behind the era of portable mass-kits when he ordered a 'splendid Moroco' missal for Arisaig 'and then the plain one will serve in the Braes. I think you promised me when last in the country a suit of vestments from yourself for the Braes.'¹³ McIntosh sought clarity on boundaries, but his Arisaig people sometimes worshipped with MacColl in North Morar, who 'had thank God a very large congregation Sunday last owing a good deal to Prayers being in the Braes of Arisaig, which sometimes occasions this.'

MacColl's vestments and chalice came from Beaufort Castle, as did an item of clothing new to the coast: 'Lady Lovate has sent us a Sutan at which I am very happy.' The Bracara priest was content in other ways:

The whole of the flat part of the country from Arisaig to Lochmorar I may say is one lake and the rain continues with very little abatement. . . I am happy however to say that the windows of the Chapel & House resist the rain surprisingly, & that very little water is taken in by them. Few in these countries are occupying a house freer of rain, and I may say smoke if attention be paid to cleaning the chimney. I have no reason at present to complain of damp in the Tabernacle since I put red hot irons into it. Mr Neil MacDonald of Knoydart suggested this plan & it can be done with little risk with care taking.¹⁴

Although not highly regarded by clerical authority, these priests worked well together. When MacDonald was away on sick leave MacColl said Sunday mass in 'the Strath of Knoydart, where our own people can easily in any thing of good weather attend as well as the Knoydart people themselves.'¹⁵ MacColl broke his collar bone 'on a visit to see Mr Neil in time of that frost', suffering from the delayed attention of a Skye blacksmith.¹⁶ Renowned for his willingness to travel, the Morar priest received 80 Easter communicants in

Moidart, 238-9. For Clanranald's threat to close the chapel see I. MacKay, 'Clanranald's tacksmen of the late 18th century', *TGSI*, 44 (1964) 17.

13 McIntosh, 6 Mar. 1838. Bishop Plessis of Quebec found Highland clergy ignorant of liturgical dress and most chapels short of vestments: 'A Scottish priest, wearing lay attire, places around his neck a stole. . . With this he preaches, hears confessions, and administers all the sacraments.' A. A. Johnston, *A History of the Catholic Church in Eastern Nova Scotia* (Antigonish 1960) i, 230. But McIntosh included '12 yds Muslin for Albs' in his Barra expenses. McIntosh, 22 Aug. 1839.

14 MacColl, Bracara, 9 Feb. 1838. For local detail see A. Roberts, *Catholic Chapels of Morar and Knoydart*, Mallaig Heritage Centre, www.mallaigheritage.org.uk.

15 MacColl, 10 July 1838. MacColl wished to be an obedient subject: 'I should have asked sooner for your Lordship's approval.'

16 MacColl, 25 May 1838. A doctor failed to cross the Sound of Sleat from Skye, then Dr Coll Dalilea decided it was too late to re-set the bone.

'the Braes of Knoydart'¹⁷ at 'the old chapel whither Mr Niel never goes to officiate, although you see they are entitled to one Sunday of the three.'¹⁸

On the basis of his sums ('164 + 164 + 117 = 445 adults') McIntosh concluded that MacDonald 'might calculate on 300 and upwards every Sunday with ordinary weather that he would celebrate mass in the Strath or upper part near Glengarry's. And were Mr Niel and Mr Coll to suit their days both sides of Lochnevis might have prayers in their own neighbourhood 2 Sundays of the 3.'¹⁹ Such precision was always liable to founder on MacDonald 'making so light of being absent on Sunday (for he was here wind bound),'²⁰ and MacColl who went to Moidart 'to hear Mr Alex'^r's confession. . . For this mighty important affair Mr Coll left his people without Mass that Sunday.'²¹

Marriage banns featured in a fierce dispute which drove Coll MacColl from his rainproof Bracara chapel-house to the drier climes of Australia. Deeper concerns than those of legality caused the Morar priest to oppose his neighbour and superior, but he ended by tacitly supporting an appeal to the Sheriff Court at Fort William. On account of its symbolic significance – old customs versus new systems - and the fact that it provoked a 2,000-word letter from McIntosh to his bishop, the incident merits close attention.

Much detail is set forth, all (except a copy of MacColl's lengthy 'line' on the bride) from McIntosh's point of view. Other aspects may be inferred or derived from other sources. A key event must have place in the summer of 1840, during the season when young people minded cattle in high pastures from sheilings, resulting in a winter meeting at Bracara.²² There three priests (MacColl, McIntosh and Archibald Chisholm) examined Ann MacLellan of Stoule prior to her marriage to Ewan MacDougald of Polnish.²³ Also

17 McIntosh, 9 Jan. 1842.

18 McIntosh, 31 Jan. 1839. This was the 'long thatched house at Samadlan' by Inverguseran. Blundell, *Catholic Highlands*, ii, 81. In 1836 Glenelg's minister despised 'a chapel, if the half-dilapidated and straw-covered hut, which serves as a place of worship, may be dignified with that name.' *New Statistical Account*, Glenelg, 141.

19 McIntosh, 31 Jan. 1839. He felt 'it would not be prudent to collect people so addicted to drink about the Inn on a Sunday'.

20 McIntosh, 30 July 1838.

21 McIntosh, 22 Jan. 1840. Alexander MacDonald was living at Eilean Shona on a year's trial prior to being accepted for the Northern District.

22 Matters were out in the open three weeks before the marriage on 17 February 1841. McIntosh and MacColl were still on good terms when 'Poor Mr Ranald fell into the fire two days ago and burned his hands severely and cut his face, so that he is in a dangerous way. Mr McColl sent for Dr McCallum. . .' McIntosh, 10 Nov. 1840. Peace still reigned on 29 November, when the old priest was 'recovering though still confined to his bed.' Ranald MacDonald died on Christmas Day.

23 Ewan MacDougald's father may have been John McDougall (75), a weaver living with his wife at Lower Polnish in 1841.

involved was 'a lad in Bracara' who claimed there had been 'a previous but private promise.' This was almost certainly the priest's server who had accompanied MacColl - and his fiddle - on journeys through Morar and beyond: 'Ronald MacDonald my clerk'.²⁴ Loyalty to the rejected suitor would explain MacColl's impassioned support.

Stoule was a settlement on Loch Nevis, north of Bracara, and MacDonald's tryst with Ann MacLellan took place (romantically enough) near stepping-stones which still divide Lochan Stoule from Lochan Ropach: 'Rod. said to her that he heard she was to be married and she said that she was not. But she said that a man on the farm²⁵ had told her that a certain man was coming to ask her. Rod. said that he did not know but she would take another in preference to him (Rod.) and she answered that it would be a while before she would have such an affection for another. Rod. said to her, Give me your hand that you will not take another, she said, there it is.'

McIntosh's report then descended into farce. MacDonald rejected the left hand and took the right, 'which he kept for a while', expressing doubts about whether 'her people' would accept him. She replied that her father 'would be willing any day.' Cross-examined, Ann said that she had made no promise to meet at the top of the hill and 'did not go apart with him from the rest of the company.' Her mother had a better opinion of him than of his brother Sandy. Finally 'She declares that she never said she would not marry another besides him. She declares she did not on that occasion say to this effect, "I do promise to marry you." If I go to ask you - (said he) I cannot say (said she) but that I would be willing to marry him if my parents would give their consent.'

All was discussed in Gaelic and recorded in English as for a court of law. MacDonald did indeed make a last ditch legal attempt to prevent the wedding, although McIntosh heard from the Sheriff that 'the writers at Fortwilliam scouted the idea of his making out a claim of damages.' He was sure that MacDonald had been put up to it by MacColl, who thus 'brought disgrace upon that church of which he is himself a member.' McIntosh stressed that this was an attempt to 'stir up the Kirk to insist upon her legal, but here unprecedented, right of having all proclamations made at the parish church.' He had decided against proclaiming the marriage at the parish churches of Ardnamurchan and Glenelg - partly on obvious grounds of practicality,²⁶ but also to avoid awakening 'the slumbering avarice and love of ascendancy of the kirk'.

24 McIntosh made him 'Roderick' in the rushed account put together after the marriage, but refers to him as 'Rod.' 'Ronald MacDonald my clerk' was sponsor to a child baptised at Glendessary on 11 December 1833 and on other occasions. Morar Register.

25 He was later identified as Angus McDonald 'in Stole'

26 Both Kilchoan in Ardnamurchan and Glenelg, north of Knoydart, lay outside the Rough Bounds. In the 1793 Statistical Account Glenelg's minister wrote only that 'North-

MacColl used the certificate of character he was required by McIntosh to provide on Ann MacLellan to state that since a 'prior promise had not been taken out of the way as yet – under such circumstances I do not consider myself authorised to celebrate said marriage more especially as they have applied to another clergyman.' In the knowledge that 'the party aggrieved' had 'applied for redress to the laws of the Scottish Kirk', he washed his hands of the affair – while providing MacDonald with written evidence that banns had 'not been three times proclaimed either in my chapel or in the Parish Kirk.'

At a second Bracara meeting McIntosh 'ordered the girl's father²⁷ to give express orders in my presence to proclaim and told Mr Coll on his peril to execute the same.' As a result, the Sunday before the wedding 'Mr Coll, after proclaiming the parties in question, gave a long lecture to the exclusion of every other sermon or discourse abusing the girl for breach of promise. . . This appears to me a slander on the girl's character and demands a public reparation.' It is worth emphasising that McIntosh only required this single proclamation 'as that was the custom invariably in N. Morar.'²⁸ It could scarcely have been regarded as sufficient on any level, but McIntosh's entry gave no hint of anything untoward: 'Ewan McDougald Polnish and Ann McLellan Stole, after due proclamation of banns were married by me this 17th Feb 1841 according to the rites of the RC Church in presence of Alex McDougald & Duncan McDougald and others.'

All previous entries in the Arisaig register named a female witness on behalf of the bride, so it appears that her family chose not to defy their priest (and possibly local opinion) by attending the nuptials. The wedding took place at Cross, a farm on the edge of the Arisaig mission which had been the mainland base of the Morar MacDonalds.²⁹ For the purpose of this dispute it was frontier territory: 'I next desired them to come and demand marriage of Mr Coll on Wednesday last being the first following the proclamation of banns, and on refusal . . . I would meet them at Cross and tie the matrimonial knot, which I did last afternoon.'

After this demonstration of authority McIntosh went further, putting it to Scott that 'the facility with which his mind can be warped and his

morrow is rocky and mountainous, mostly adapted for cattle' (OSA, Glenelg, 73). The very full 1836 account merely noted a chapel 'in course of erection'. NSA, Glenelg, 141. The law's demands would not have been fulfilled by proclaiming banns in the mission church of Arisaig.

27 In the 1841 census Archibald MacLelland was at Stoule with his wife Catherine and seven children aged from two to twenty years.

28 There were other factors: 'They had been now three Sundays known to the public under contract of marriage. And for the same reason last mentioned I did not proclaim them but once in Arisaig in which one of the parties resides; owing partly also to our being near the season of Lent.'

29 A. Roberts, 'Allan Roy MacDonald of Morar', *Clan Donald Magazine* (forthcoming).

judgement bewildered by designing people' proved that 'Mr Coll is incapable of deciding any complicated case of the kind, yes totally unfit for it.' As it happened (and this may have contributed to his boldness) MacColl had been considering emigration since he fell into debt over sheep sales in 1838: 'I must take myself elsewhere, where I may have a better chance among the natives or convicts of Australia if I escape being taken by the neck.'³⁰

Bishop Scott responded promptly, and appropriately as far as his vicar general was concerned - although the letter which MacColl received about the end of February fell short of dismissing him. McIntosh replied with equal promptitude: 'This afternoon I was informed by common report that Mr Coll told the congregation last Sunday that he had no longer charge of the mission of N. Morar; that he was without a church and without a home; that he would officiate only next Sunday. . . I would gladly go over and advise him to resume his functions, were it not that the tenor of your letter showed that you would have no objections to his suspending himself.'³¹ Two days later the matter was resolved - to McIntosh's evident satisfaction: 'Wonders will never cease. Mr Coll came here this afternoon and made his humble submission, and is to make his humble apology Sunday first according to the form dictated by me. I have not seen Glenaladale since, but I suspect he has the merit of Mr Coll's conversion. You require no comments from me on this ecclesiastical farce, or rather clerical tragedy, for I think I said in my last that Mr Coll concluded by suspending himself ecclesiastice.'³²

Leaving aside much detail on the priest's farm and stock, the rest of the story is quickly told. Relatives of MacColl had gone ahead to Australia by the time he met his bishop at Arisaig in June, though the priest's own intentions were unclear and Scott still awaited 'the scrap of a pen'.³³ MacColl himself was waiting for a letter. Bishop Polding had written from Sydney to Lord John Russell at the Colonial Office requesting £150 for 'outfit and passage' for three priests including him, and this was approved on 29 June 1841.³⁴ In July MacColl spent a fortnight at Beaufort Castle. On leaving Morar at the end of August he was still a priest with faculties and something more, as McIntosh reported: 'I had a great try to get the chalice and missal belonging to Tarbet

30 MacColl, Bracara, 21 Mar. 1838. From 1838, thanks to Ranald Rankin, Highland emigration schemes ceased to focus on North America. Prentis, 'Scottish Catholics in Australia', 62, 67.

31 McIntosh, 9 Mar 1841. In the absence of a letter of resignation, 'should he persist in his present intention the parish must be served by the neighbouring clergymen during its vacancy.' Knoydart's priest, however, had requested permission to 'quit the Kingdom' on account of 'oppressions' over money raised, but not used, for a chapel. MacDonald, Knoydart, 2 Mar. 1841. A leading layman was earlier 'very angry with Mr McIntosh' for not checking the facts. A. R. MacDonald, Inverguseran, to Scott, 28 April 1840.

32 McIntosh, 11 Mar. 1841.

33 Scott to Chisholm, Bornish, 11 Aug. 1841.

34 *Historical Records of Australia*, Series I, xxi (Sydney 1824) 422-3.

chapel from him. He carried them and an old suit of vestments as far as Arisaig, and he has some hankering after the vestments sent by Lady Lovat, he is not sure but they may be a personal present.’³⁵

No doubt the cherished soutane went to Australia, unsuited though it was to pioneer life.³⁶ In 1841 Caroline Chisholm began her work for women who landed at Sydney, so a Strathglass connection may be presumed. Her husband Archibald (from Fasnakyle in the upper district) helped Gaelic-speakers find work in New South Wales.³⁷ The Lovats in lower Strathglass must have encouraged MacColl to make a fresh start. Bishop John Bede Polding (formerly of Downside Abbey) who maintained a Benedictine seminary in Sydney, provided a welcome for ‘Colin McColl, OSB’.³⁸ Perhaps he took the first step to becoming a member of the Order of St Benedict in the Bishop’s house.

It could only have been a very small step. While in his fifties, and regularly over-exerting himself on the passes between Loch Morar and Loch Arkaig, MacColl had suffered a heart attack at Glenaladale’s house. It was this Angus MacDonald (father of bishops-to-be) who persuaded him to make a public apology to Ann MacLellan after she was safely married at Polish.³⁹ Two years before that career-saving climb down MacColl told his bishop: ‘I am not very stout but better thank God than when I had the violent shock at Borodale but still faint at heart.’⁴⁰ He died ‘in the fifty-sixth year of his age’ three weeks after landing, having gone north with another priest to open a mission at the convict settlement of Port Macquarie.⁴¹

35 McIntosh, 26 Aug. 1841. After taking the coastal steamer from Arisaig to Greenock, MacColl sailed in the ‘Hope’ from Liverpool on 10 October.

36 ‘It isn’t easy to go from six to eight miles on foot, sometimes through snow more than knee-high, and to drag after you a soutane that gets tangled in your legs.’ Johnston, *Eastern Nova Scotia*, 440.

37 J. Bogle, *Caroline Chisholm: The Emigrant’s Friend* (Leominster 1993) 48. The father and mother of Mary MacKillop, Australia’s first saint, left Lochaber in 1838 and 1840.

38 Prentis, ‘Scottish Catholics in Australia’, 68. Described as ‘from Tiree’, this is clearly Coll MacColl.

39 Ann MacDougall had a son at Polish in February 1842 and a daughter in March 1843. Arisaig Register. She was born blind. Archie MacLellan, Morar, pers. com. 24 Aug. 2002.

40 MacColl, Bracara, 4 April 1839.

41 *Australasian Chronicle*, 1 Feb., 3 Mar. 1842. In fact he was in his fifty-fifth year.