

A' Bhean-uasal agus An Eilean

The Lady and the Island

Lady Victoria Campbell

Lady Victoria, the eighth child of the eighth Duke of Argyll, became a frequent visitor to Tìree at the end of the nineteenth century. A committed Christian and philanthropist, she set up classes, soup kitchens for the hungry, and arranged treats for the young people of the island.

She was born in 1854 in the heart of the British establishment. Her mother was a close friend of Queen Victoria (and after whom she was named), and Prime Minister Gladstone would occasionally be a dinner guest. Her father held senior positions in the Liberal Government until he resigned over Irish Home Rule. Her mother was also politically active in the anti-slavery movement.

At the age of five, she developed polio, which left one of her legs weak. Thereafter, she walked slowly with a caliper and two walking sticks. Later she almost died from pneumonia, and became prone to chest infections all her life. Despite these setbacks, she was determined, fearless and strong-willed. One of her favourite sayings was: *'If it has **got** to be done, it **can** be done'*. She said later that she would have liked to have travelled to India, where her brother was stationed, to do good works.

Her father was a regular churchgoer, but relaxed about the 'brand' of Christianity. Her aunt became a strong supporter of the Free Church. Lady Victoria's sympathies were with the Church of Scotland, but she sought out intelligent and charismatic preachers wherever she stayed.



A 1930s postcard of 'The Lodge' on the shores of Gott Bay. This was rebuilt in 1897 from a former school and then gamekeeper's house. The Census taken in March 1901 finds Lady Victoria Campbell (recorded as a speaker of Gaelic and English) in residence with five servants in a building with thirteen rooms. This is now a hotel with extensions to the front.



Lady Victoria Campbell at the age of thirty-one in 1885, the year before she started visiting Tìree.

The Victorian era was a period of fashionable philanthropy, when many of today's well-known charities were founded. At the age of twenty-four, Lady Victoria paid her first charitable visit to the Home for Crippled Boys in Kensington, where she read aloud to the boys in their workshop. The next year she set up a group in Inveraray: *'Her clothing clubs were baits for the ingathering of her classes. When she had got the mothers, she was in touch with the children, and that led to soup-kitchens in the winter, and greater facilities for procuring milk for the schoolchildren.'*

Lady Victoria's first sight of Tìree was in 1878 from the deck of her father's steam yacht, the *Columba*. It was four years later at the age of twenty-eight that she had a revelation in Iona Abbey. This led to a decision to dedicate her life to the islands, in particular Iona, the Ross of Mull and Tìree. In 1885 she began classes to learn Gaelic, and in 1886 she persuaded her father, who was preoccupied and both anxious and furious at the activities of the Land League on Tìree, to allow her to visit the island for a few weeks.