

## THE HISTORY OF TIREE IN 100 OBJECTS - no. 13

### **MARY STEWART'S FOGHORN**

This is said to be the foghorn from the smack *Mary Stewart*, whose keel still lies in Scarinish harbour. It was originally a car horn, possibly from the first car on the island, which Johnny Brown from the Scarinish Hotel brought to Tiree around 1924. Janet Martin remembered that it was a family tradition to blow the horn and hoist the *Mary Stewart's* flag up the chimney if there was a wedding in the township.

The *Mary Stewart* was built in Ardrossan on the north Ayrshire coast in 1868 for Andrew Stewart from Whiting Bay on Arran. Mary was presumably one of his family, but we have not, so far, pinpointed her. After a number of owners, in 1908 she came to Tiree from Northern Ireland to be skippered by Donald MacLean, *Dòmhnall Og* 'young Donald'. She worked the west coast, from Thurso and Stornoway to Ireland, and brought coal to Tiree regularly. She was rigged as a double topsail schooner, with two masts and a long bowsprit with two jibs, and was one of the fastest boats in her trade.

Getting into and out of Scarinish harbour in a large sailing vessel was not easy. To enter she needed a south wind, and would sometimes have to anchor in Gott Bay for a week or more awaiting the right conditions. To leave she needed a northerly and was towed out to the lighthouse by a rowboat.

"We used to get out of school when the *Mary Stewart* was setting sail to go to Troon for a cargo of coal...The teacher used to take us out to the lighthouse...The skipper was a very good sailor, and he was also a very good man with his hands, joinery...he would do all the repairs himself. On this occasion there was something wrong with the seat of the mast, and he found out it wasn't quite safe to carry the sails without carrying out some repair. He had to take the mast completely out. He used the aft mast to [lift it out] and he used the rings in the rocks to keep the boat secure. People in the village wondered what Mr MacLean was up to with all the ropes and blocks and tackles. And somebody asked him what he was going to do, and he told them he was going to take the mast out. So the news went round. Somebody said, "He'll never manage it" and somebody said, "Yes. He'll manage it. He's a clever man!" Anyway, Mr MacArthur the shopkeeper said to this man, "I'll give you half a pound of tobacco if you bet that Mr MacLean will take the mast out of the schooner. The butcher, Mr MacKinnon, said "I'll give you a gigot of lamb if you take the mast out of the schooner". The great day came, and he took the topmast first...that one was lowered onto the sandy beach. Then he laid the mainmast down on the beach and he carried on with the repair to the seat. And then he put the mast back...and the

man won his bet...I remember that myself; I was at school" (Donald MacIntyre talking to Dr Margaret MacKay, SA.1974.140).

As steam puffers ate into her trade, the *Mary Stewart* was beached for the last time in 1937 in the harbour, where her hull has gradually rotted. Donald MacLean continued to fish until his death in 1944 at the age of 86, and his family received the cheque for his last consignment of lobsters after he had died.

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