

THE HISTORY OF TIREE IN 100 OBJECTS - no. 17

THE STORY BEHIND A LABEL

At first sight, you might not call this insignificant brown label one of our 'crown jewels'. But, like so many everyday objects, it tells a fascinating story when you scratch below the surface - and poses a question or two along the way. The information that came with it was that it related to a shipment of wood that came to Tiree in the 1920s. What does this piece of faded card tell us about getting goods from the mainland a hundred years ago?

From: The label came from **MacKenzie and Moncur Limited, 'Hothouse Builders, Heating and Electrical Engineers and Ironfounders'**. Their three acre factory was on Balcarres Sreet, in the Morningside district of Edinburgh, but they also had branches in London and Glasgow. The company had started business around 1850 and specialised in the making of swanky heated greenhouses. A 1900 catalogue listed a 'Range of Hothouses, Winter Gardens, Conservatories, Plant Houses, Pavilions and Summer Houses', and went on, 'We hold stocks of the best St Petersburg redwood and of teakwood, all of which is thoroughly seasoned before being wrought'. They also made heating systems for public buildings such as churches. 'Teakwood is now extensively used, especially for houses requiring a high temperature or a moist environment'. They had a distinguished clientele, supplying buildings to Queen Victoria, the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York, among others. They also had a foundry on Slateford Road, Edinburgh and went on to manufacture street furniture such as lamp posts and drain covers (look for their name the next time you are on the mainland). In 1961 they had 400 employees and were taken over by Balfour Kilpatrick in the early 1970's.

Per [by]: Rail and Steamer: MacKenzie and Moncur's factory in Edinburgh had been built on the railway line, so the timber, if indeed that was what the cargo was, would have been easily loaded.

Carriage: FOB Glasgow: FOB is a legal term, still used today, for sea freight. It stands for 'Free On Board', and is usually followed by the name of a port. FOB signifies the precise point at which the responsibility and costs of the seller pass to the buyer. MacKenzie and Moncur therefore paid for the shipment to the quayside in Glasgow; at the moment it was swung into the ship's hold Archibald MacDonald 'owned' it and had to pay the insurance and shipping costs.

To: Mr Archibald MacDonald, Kilmoluaig, Tiree. Archibald MacDonald lived at *Taigh Iain Èirdsidh Mhòir*, now a substantial ruin south of Iain and Fiona MacLeod's house (I thank Rena MacPhail, Clachan, for helping me with this). In the 1911 Census Archibald MacDonald appears as a crofter, aged 45, with a wife Mary, and children

Lachlan, Christina, John, Donald and Mary. *Iain Chaluum*, Kilmoluaig, told me that Archie's son, *Iain Èirdsidh Mhòir* (known as *Am Fear Ruadh* 'the red man'), once walked out to a little rock in *Loch Bhassabol* called *Eilean MhicChonnail* one winter over the ice which could be heard cracking under his feet as he scrambled onto dry land.

Rail to Glasgow [?then] per McCallum Orme and Cos [?steamer] SS *Dunara Castle* from Shed 44, Lancefield Quay to Tiree

The iron passenger cargo steamship *Dunara Castle* had been built in Port Glasgow for Martin Orme in 1875. She had berths for forty four passengers and made a regular round trip up the west coast with cargo for the islands. From 1877 during summer months the trip was extended to isolated St Kilda, and she was the vessel that evacuated the last islanders in 1930. An advertisement for the *Hebrides*, a rival steamer sailing the same route for John MacCallum's line read: 'A Week's Delightful Circular Touring by Splendidly Fitted Steamer *Hebrides* from Glasgow every Ten Days, 11 am; and from Greenock at 4.30 pm; sailing via Islay, Colonsay Oban, Mull, Coll, Tiree, Skye, Uist and Barra. Cabin for Round, Board included, 70 shillings.' The *Dunara Castle* was scrapped in 1948. The Lancefield Quay is on the north shore of the Clyde near the Broomielaw. It was busy place in the 1920s if it had forty four sheds!

This label, and other invoices we have in the archive, tells us that islanders regularly bought goods from mainland suppliers a hundred years ago, and there was a well-developed freight system to get them here, sailing from the middle of Glasgow. One fascinating question remains to be answered: what did Archibald buy from this prestigious supplier?

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