

THE HISTORY OF TIREE IN 100 OBJECTS - no. 7

THE FIRST PLANE TO COME TO TIREE

The first plane to land on the island came on the day of the Tiree Association sports on July 18 1929. It came bearing that day's editions of the *Glasgow Herald* and *Bulletin* as well as a special edition of the *Evening Times*, which contained a message in Gaelic addressed to the islanders.

Newspaper 'Plane For Tiree

'Residents of the remote little island of Tiree...today will see for the first time at close quarters the modern magic carpet – an aeroplane. The machine, an Avro, which leaves Moorpark Aerodrome, Renfrew, early this afternoon is expected to arrive at the island while a sports programme is being carried out on the Reef, and its visit will be one of the features of the day. It has on board a supply of...today's edition of *The Evening Times*, which contains a message of greeting in Gaelic from the editor to residents and visitors. The paper will be in demand as souvenirs of a unique occasion. Credit for this enterprise goes to Glasgow Tiree Association, one of the most energetic of the Highland associations in the city.'

The message translates as: 'The Editor of the *Evening Times* in Glasgow sends his best wishes to the people of Tiree, and to those welcomed onto the island, and he hopes they will always be happy, friendly and cheerful.'

Local people were gathered on the top of *Cnoc nan Deilgeanan* 'the hillock of the thistles' in Crossapol, just north of the Camp,. Janet Wilson, Cornaigbeg, remembered the day. "We always came in July, Glasgow Fair, and the Tiree Sports were on...we had the slow cycle races...piping competitions, dancing, Eightsome Reels and the Highland Fling...Just up the road from us [in Glasgow] was Renfrew Airport, I remember airships in the first World War, these things weren't new to me [but] to the Tiree people a plane was something wonderful...the plane came in, Oh! Great rejoicing! It took people up, I think it was half a crown, they called it a 'flip'. My cousin Hector...hid under a horse or a cow." Hugh MacKinnon (*Eòghann Dhòmhnail*), known as 'The Contractor', owned one of the few cars on the island, and met the plane, taking the pilot and a representative of the newspaper group to lunch.

The flight had been commissioned by the Tiree Association, founded in 1900, under its president Hugh Alexander Low. The weather leaving Renfrew was showery with low clouds, and the two-seater kept to the coast of Argyll and along the Sound of Mull. The pilot was Albert Norman Kingwill, who had joined the Royal Flying Corps as a 15 year old during the First World War, ending the war with the Air Force Cross. By

1929 he was working in Manchester for Northern Air Lines. The *Herald* report has him piloting a de Havilland DH 60 Cirrus II Moth, but he had been flying an Avro 504N powered by Armstrong Siddeley *Genet* engines the month before at the Manchester Air Pageant in a display of 'inverted' (upside down) flying, and the *Evening Times* reports he was flying an Avro. Part of the Manchester Air Pageant was an enactment called 'The Rescue'. The show was described thus: 'a passenger machine flew to a village situated in troubled country where the natives were threatening the white population. It was escorted by fighting aircraft. It landed and the white people dashed towards it, whilst the natives opened fire to show their irritation. But the machine took off safely as the fighting aircraft attacked the natives with machine guns and eventually tried a little persuasion with bombs. Then the village caught fire, which was not surprising, and so the poor natives got none.'

The spectators in Tiree were not treated to a display on this scale, but Kingwill did some acrobatics, returning to Glasgow after four hours. He went on to perform in the 1930s with the Cobham Air Circus, which featured 'Dancing in the Air' and an air race around a course of pylons. In the Second World War he re-joined the RAF, leaving with the rank of Wing Commander. In 1958 Kingwill was reported to be training officers of the Peruvian Air Force in new jet aircraft. He died in 1979 aged 80.

The Tiree Association may have brought out planes for a few years, and some early plane stories may have occurred in 1930 or 1931. Certainly one year you could pay half a crown for a flight around the island.

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