

## THE HISTORY OF TIREE IN 100 OBJECTS - no. 8

### DONALD THE PILOT

In our archives is a copy of a fascinating handwritten text by Donald MacLean of Hynish House, who died in 1907. In it he describes the adventures of his grandfather, also Donald MacLean, in September 1746. Bonny Prince Charlie had been on the run for five months following his defeat at the Battle of Culloden. Keeping one step ahead of the redcoats, the prince was sheltered by sympathisers around the Highlands and Hebrides. Eventually the French sent the frigate *L'Heureux* to rescue his party from *Loch nan Uamh* south of Mallaig. Donald MacLean's text is as follows (the spelling has been left largely in its original form):

'The following is what report I heard from my father over 70 years ago. A French frigate, anchored in Got Bay east of Scarinish sent a boat ashore on the sandy beach. [They] captured a man Niel Mac Faden and wished him piolate [pilot] them to Lochnarnuagh [*Loch nan Uamh*]. He told them he knew nothing of the coast, but pointed to my grandfather's house and told them that Donald MacLean, Ruaig, Tyree knew the coast better than any man about the place. My gran Father went with them on condition they would land him at home on there return. They were 2 days at Lochnarnuagh. On there return, instead of takeing the south side of Coll and Tiree, they made for the north side straight for Barra Head. When my glanfater observed there course he understood that France was there destination. As it was very dark at the east end of Coll, my father advised Mac Faden to slip in a boat that hung at the stern and lay at the bottom. When near a cluster of small island at the east of Coll my granfather entered the small boat, cut the ropes and made for the small rocks before they put the frigate about and got a boat launched they were away among the rocks. They pulled away to the south and landed on south west of Coll at Port na Liugeadh, near MacLean's castle. MacLean claimed the boat. My granfather never forgot the loss of the boat. He and MacFaden had to cross the ferry between Coll and Tyree. The report of their motion became known before they returned. MacFadyen [was] not interfered with as it was known he was carried against his will, but my granfather was led to a cave in Vaul on the north side of Tiree where he remained for 9 months. His health give way. His father brought him home and went with him to Tobermory. On the way the packet [ferry] from Tobermory past them with [a] pardon for all below a Captain in Charley's army. My glanfater was surrendered to the [indecipherable] but they never let him off[f] the pardon. He was send the army, it must have been the Black Watch, or what we now call the 42 [nd Highland Regiment]. A lot of young gentlemen [in] the country. He was observed by [Allan] MacLean of Drum [sic, possibly Drimnin]. When Drum heard his tale he told him he would soon release him for 2 years. When MacLean met him again he was

much surprised but he got off in a few days.' Donald MacLean left the army, returned to Tiree and lived to be nearly 80, dying around 1800.

This piece was the basis for an article in the *Daily Express* in 1930. 'Donald the Pilot', as he became known, has a large number of descendants around the world, one of whom, Charles MacLean of Edinburgh, has done much to publicise the story. The events are certainly plausible. During the 1745 uprising many on Tiree were still extremely hostile to the Campbell acquisition of the island in 1679. They supported the Jacobite cause, threatening, as one report had it, 'to sacrifice the factor...they have constantly been upon the flutter'. Donald MacLean may well not have needed much persuading to serve Bonny Prince Charlie. The anchoring of a French frigate in Gott Bay, however, is likely to have created a stir, and it is hard to believe that Campbell loyalists would not have tried to alert the authorities, who were engaged in a huge manhunt. There is also another 'Donald the Pilot', Donald MacCleod of Galtrigill, Skye, who sailed the prince across to the Outer Isles. He has been named 'The Faithful Palinurus' after a Roman mythical figure. Although he was quite an old man, Donald MacCleod of Galtrigill was captured in Benbecula and held on a prison ship in London before being released.

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