

The Island of Two Harvests

Extracts from the book *The Island of Two Harvests*

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Na Clachan The Geology of Tìree

Tìree is made of a hard, grey rock called Lewisian gneiss (pronounced 'nice'). This is the oldest rock in Europe – almost 3,000 million years old. Some of that time the gneiss has been deep underground, where fantastic heat and pressure (30 kilometres deep and 1,000° C) produced the bands in the rock you can see today. Geologists call it a metamorphic rock.

At times the rock has been twisted madly so that the banding can be pointing to the sky, as it is at the Crossapol end of *Tràigh Bhàigh*.

600 million years ago Tìree was near the South Pole, part of a huge continent known as Laurentia. Over millions of years its rock inched northwards, passing the equator and finishing on the north west edge of Europe.

Gneiss does not soak up water and the flat land in the middle of the island is often wet. Over thousands of years the plants of this wetland grew, died and compacted to form thick layers of peat. This landscape of rocky outcrops, pools and tussocky grass is known as *sliabh*.

In Gaelic, Tìree is known as *tìr bàrr fo thuinn* – the island whose top lies below the waves. If you sail out to Skerryvore lighthouse you can see how the island got its name as only the three hilltops are visible, floating above the horizon. Tìree is so low lying that the sea pushes in at many points. 35% of the coastline is beach, twice as much as on Coll.

The sands of these long, white beaches are made of crushed shells. Winds pile this shell sand into dunes and then blow it further inland where it has built up a fertile, well-drained, flower rich grassland known as *machair*. The Reef is one of the largest expanses of wet *machair* in the world. It is grazed by around 200 cows in the winter, which allows the flowers to grow and seed in the summer.

The last Ice Age began 18,000 years ago. Ice built up on the Scottish mainland and huge glaciers inched their way over Tìree, grinding the rock beneath and leaving boulders, called erratics, behind them. The highest erratics on Tìree are near the top of Kenavara, showing how thick the ice was, probably twice as high as the Golf Ball on Ben Hynish. Some of the bare rock on the island shows the scars of the ice as it raked the landscape from west to east.

The most famous erratic, thought to have come from Rum to the north, is the Ringing Stone, between Balephetrish and Vaul. This boulder gets its name from the sound it makes when hit. An old story, however, warns that if it is struck too hard and cracks, Tìree will also break in two. Its Gaelic name is *Clach a' Choire*, the rock of the hollow. It is covered with over 50 cup markings, which are Neolithic and were probably used in religious rituals.

Sea levels around the world have gone up and down over the ages and there are a number of raised beaches around Tìree, for example at Kilmoluaig and between Ruaig

and Milton. However, the sea level around Tiree has been around the present level for the last 10,000 years.

A small seam of beautiful red-green 'Tiree' marble was discovered in Balephetrish in 1764 and a small quarry was set up in 1791. It was badly run and it closed after three years. The Duke of Argyll used this marble to make the chimney pieces of the Billiard Room in Inveraray Castle and marble pebbles can be found on the island's beaches.

Muinntir nan clach People of the Stones

The first people to set foot on Tiree came to the island over 9,000 years ago, having island-hopped from the mainland to Mull, and then on to Coll and Gunna. They arrived not long after the climate warmed at the end of the last Ice Age. The shoreline was roughly as it is today but the island was covered with a scrubby woodland of hazel, alder and birch.

These first visitors were Mesolithic hunter-gatherers, who came to the island in the summer to feast on limpets and birds' eggs from the Kenavara cliffs. They also fished and ate hazel nuts, the roots of silverweed and probably seals. In the winter they are likely to have retreated to the shelter of Mull or around Oban. Another of Tiree's major attractions would have been the nodules of flint, rare in the Inner Hebrides, which are washed up on our western beaches.

No one has been able to explain the find of a rare 'tanged' flint (a flint point whose base is tapered) by an archaeologist digging in the Red Mound, Balevullin, in the 1920s. It is similar to flints made in Northern Europe 30,000 years ago.

Around 6,000 years ago, in the Neolithic period, people in Scotland learned how to grow primitive barley and domesticate pigs, cattle and sheep. The light, easy-to-plough Tiree soil seems to have attracted the island's first year-round settlers. These people buried their dead in tombs that stood out on the skyline, like one on the Balevullin *sliabh*. Elsewhere they made circular cup markings on many prominent rocks on the island, such as the Ringing Stone.

Around 4,000 years ago a new Bronze Age culture reached Tiree. As well as using metal for the first time, there were new way of honouring the dead, with graves as at *Cnoc an Fhoimheir*, the giant's hill, in Kirkapol. Islanders also erected standing stones, for example the two stone circles at Hough.

The Iron Age, which began around 2,500 years ago, saw a spate of fort building on Tiree. These were either simple round *dùns* or larger double-walled brochs. Often these forts were built at the top of cliffs, such as at *Dùn na Cleite* at the end of Happy Valley. Whether life had become more dangerous or they were a status symbol we don't know. These buildings took thousands of man-hours to build and the fact that they are still there is a tribute to the tenacity of their builders.

The most famous Tiree fort is a broch in Vault called *Dùn Mòr Bhalla*. This was excavated in 1962. 4,139 pieces of pottery alone were found. This broch had once been 30 feet high with a double wall 13 feet thick containing a staircase. On the right inside the front door was a guard room. Any (right-handed) attackers would have held their shields in their left hands and the guard could have attacked them on their unprotected side. It was built in 60 AD and occupied for some 300 years.

Amongst the finds in Vault were parts of a Roman glass bottle, similar to ones used by Roman soldiers. Today we often like to think of Tiree as an isolated island on the

edge of Europe. Two thousand years ago the island was connected to mainland Britain and even Europe, by strong trade links.

The inhabitants of *Dùn Shiadair* in West Hynish, are said to have buried their gold when they left the fort. The treasure has never been found.

On the north side of Kenavara there is a cave called *Uaimh a' Ruith*. A traditional story tells how a piper and his dog once climbed into this cave and followed the underground passage. People followed their progress above ground by listening to the sound of the pipes. At Scarinish the tune changed to one called '*If only I had three hands; two for the pipes and one for the sword!*' and then the music suddenly went quiet. The piper was never seen again but the dog reappeared from the fort above Milton harbour, *Dùn Mòr a' Chaolais*, with all its hair singed off.

The name Tìree is likely to come from Iron Age times when it seems to have been called Heeth. The next wave of Irish immigrants then called the island *Tìr* [the land of] *Heeth*.

Eilean nan Naomh Saint Columba's Other Island

Tiree was one of the centres of the early Celtic church in Scotland. St. Brendan the Navigator was the first Irish missionary to arrive on the island, landing in 514. The adventurer Tim Severin recreated Brendan's voyage in 1976 by sailing a leather boat from Ireland to Newfoundland.

In the year 563 Saint Columba sailed from Northern Ireland and built his famous monastery on Iona, soon followed by another on Tiree called *Mag Luinge*. This is often thought to have been at the site of Soroby graveyard where there used to be a church as a nearby inlet is still called *Port na Luinge*, meaning harbour of the boat.

Columba is credited as having had miraculous powers. Once two holy men wanted to leave Iona and sail in opposite directions. Each wanted a following wind. Columba said,

"Tomorrow, first thing in the morning, Baithéne [the abbot of Tiree] will have a following wind for his journey..." The Lord granted this...and at the third hour of the same day Columba sent for Colmán the priest and said to him, "Baithéne has now arrived safely at the harbour [on Tiree]...Soon the Lord will bring the wind round to the north." Within an hour the south wind had obeyed St. Columba's word and had become a breeze blowing from the north [for the voyage to Ireland].

The island was known even then for its fertility and has been described as Iona's granary. St. Columba once ordered the Tiree monastery to send a fat beast and six measures of grain to a dying man on Coll after he had been caught trying to kill some seals that belonged to Iona.

Mag Luinge also took men seeking to atone for past crimes. One of these penitents was *Librán*. He told Columba,

I killed a fellow [in Ireland]. After this I was held in chains as a guilty man. But a relative of mine, who was extremely rich, came to my rescue in the nick of time. He paid what was needed to get me off...and he saved me from death.

Librán swore to serve his relative all his life, but soon broke his promise and fled to Iona. Columba sent him to his Tiree monastery for seven years where he was known as the reed cutter. He eventually died as a very old man at a monastery in Ireland, having made peace with his family.

According to local tradition Columba himself sailed to Tiree and landed on Gott Bay. He tied his boat to some seaweed growing on a rock at the Scarinish end of the beach. When the tide came in, the boat pulled free, and Columba cursed the rock, prophesying that seaweed would never grow there again. It is still known as *Mallachaig*, the cursed one. Columba then rowed down to the other end of the beach in front of Brock. There he roped his vessel to another rock, still called *Naomhaig*, the blessed one, where his boat remained safely moored.

There was another monastery on Tiree at *Teampal Phàraig* which sits in a hollow below Kenavara at the end of Balephuill beach. The gable end of a small chapel, with an engraved cross, still stands there, along with the remains of the monks' tiny cells.

Tìr an Eòrna Our (hi)Story

Following the Iron Age, Tìree was invaded by the *Dál Riata*, Scotti who had crossed to Argyll from northern Ireland around 500 AD. They brought the Gaelic language and Christianity. After three hundred years, however, the island was under attack again, this time from the north.

The Vikings who raided the Shetlands, Orkneys and the west coast of Scotland originally came from Norway. The Norse had developed a new style of boat. These were long and fast, powered with 16 pairs of oars and with a shallow draught that allowed them to land on Tìree's sandy beaches in lightning summer raids. The monastery of Iona was ransacked in 795 and the Norse attacked Tìree for the first time soon after, carrying home both slaves and treasure before the start of the winter gales.

The Viking raiders returned to Norway with stories of Tìree's green farmland. Norse settlers came to live on the island they called Tyrvist (from which comes the name for an islander - a *Tirisdeach*, pronounced cheer-us-chugh). Over half of the township names on the island are Norse, names like Scarinish (cormorant headland), Barrapol (farm of the tomb) and Cornaig (corn bay) and it is likely that many of the best farms were taken over by the Norsemen.

Tìree found itself in the centre of a trading route stretching from Dublin, the Isle of Man, and Orkney to Norway itself. To a country today centred on Glasgow and Edinburgh, Tìree seems a remote speck on the edge of the Atlantic. In fact, until the 1700s the sea was the easiest way to get around Scotland, and Tìree was at the heart of the west coast economy.

There was more fighting in 1098 when the Norse king, Magnus Barelegs, sent an army down the west coast of Scotland to bring the local chieftains to heel. The sagas tell how,

*Wolves on Tìree's lonely shore
Dyed red their hairy jaws in gore.*

However, the Norse lost control of the island to the Isle of Man. Then in 1156 Somerled, an Argyll chieftain, defeated the Manx king and took over Argyll including Tìree. From him Tìree passed into the hands of the MacDougalls, the MacDonalds and then the MacLeans.

One of these, Lachlan Cattenach MacLean, took over Tìree in 1515. A local story says that his wife had begun an affair with an Irish nobleman. Cattenach therefore sent a relative, *Lachainn Fionn*, to Ireland to bring back the nobleman's head, telling him that in payment for his service any future crime would go unpunished. *Lachainn Fionn* did as he was asked and Cattenach duly served the lover's severed head to his wife at breakfast. She died of shock. A few years later one of *Lachainn Fionn's* horses drowned at the mill in Balinoe. In revenge, a furious *Lachainn Fionn* and his five sons took the miller and hung him on the gallows in front of Island House. Cattenach could only watch.

A bankrupt MacLean of Duart sold the island to Archibald Campbell, the eighth Earl of Argyll, in 1674. The island's MacLeans, despite their chief's sale of Tiree, did not go without a fight. Four years later they holed up in a castle surrounded by a moat on the site of the present Island House, forcing the Campbell forces to lay siege. Tiree has been owned by the Campbells, the Dukes of Argyll, ever since.

When Bonnie Prince Charlie led the 1745 rebellion only four islanders joined the rebel army, but the mood on Tiree was firmly on the Jacobite side. After his defeat at the Battle of Culloden, the Prince fled and hid among the islands on the west coast. It is said the French ship sent to rescue him anchored in Gott Bay and took Donald MacLean from Ruaig on board as a pilot. On the way home, with Bonny Prince Charlie safely on board, the French refused to drop Donald back on Tiree and he had to escape in the ship's dinghy, landing on Coll. He then hid in a cave in Vaul for nine months in case he was linked with the rescue by royalist patrols that scoured the islands looking for the Prince and his men.

By the 1700s the population of Tiree was around 1,500. They were able to feed themselves with home-grown oats, barley, potatoes, milk and fish, while exporting 300 gallons of whisky and 260 cattle a year. Justifying the poetic name for Tiree, *Tìr an Eòrna*, land of barley, a visitor at the time wrote that the islanders were, *Well cloathed and well fed, having an abundance of corn and cattle and great variety and profusion of the finest fish.*

The seas around Tiree are also rich with a long, brown seaweed called kelp, the ashes of which were used to make glass and soap. The Duke of Argyll started kelping in 1746. At that time the same ashes could be made cheaper in Spain, but during the Napoleonic Wars, which began around 1800, this supply was cut off and the price of kelp rocketed. As a result the Duke saw the money he made from island go up three-fold. He needed kelp gatherers and did all he could to encourage more people to live on Tiree. The population of the island doubled. But the end of the war meant Spanish alkali flooded the market again and price of kelp tumbled. The last kelp ash was made on Tiree in 1837. You can still see stone mounds at the shore all round the island where the kelp was dried.

The 5th Duke tried to create other jobs for the island's swollen population. He encouraged fishing, buying islanders boats and lines. He started flax growing to make linen and even tried to build a windmill in Scarinish. Trouble makers were not tolerated, however, and one in ten of the 157 islanders caught making illegal whisky were thrown off their land.

A major problem facing Tiree was the shortage of fuel. The island's peat banks had been used for two thousand years but by 1792 Tiree's minister wrote: *One end of Tiree can for a few years [more] make peats, but in the other end near 200 families are reduced to the greatest distress. They...[dig the turf] wherever there is the slightest mixture of [peat] in the soil...Sometimes in the spring they gather dried horse dung [as fuel – these were still used until recently and are known as sgaindeagan].*

By 1845 the Tiree peat banks were exhausted. Islanders were forced to make the dangerous trip to Coll or the Ross of Mull in small open boats for their supplies. Coal

puffers started coming to the island in the 1880s, discharging their cargo on the beaches of the island until the late 1950s.

The potato had been introduced to Tìree around 1700 and became the staple food for the overcrowded island. By 1811 it made up 80% of the diet of the islanders, especially for poorer people who grew them in *feannagan*, or 'lazy beds', on the *sliabh* and hillsides. This is anything but a lazy way to grow food and involves turning a row of thin soil over on itself to make a bed of ridges and furrows. You can still see the marks of these in many places on the island.

Tìree's population had reached 4,450 in 1831 when disaster struck. In 1846 potato blight hit the island, rotting the potato harvest and condemning thousands to several hungry winters. It is said that only West Hynish escaped. Famine relief flooded in but the able-bodied had first to do a day's work, called *mòrlanachd*. The stone walls in the centre of the island, such as those surrounding Island House, were built this way.

There was dreadful poverty.

*Catherine MacP***: A wretched hut made with pieces of wood and the spaces between them filled up with turf. It is full of holes. No window and no chimney. She has two natural children and begs about the country to support them.*

Poor Law Enquiry on Tìree, 1840s

A second attempt to make money from kelp began in 1864. Edward Stanford, a brilliant English chemist, set up a factory in Sandaig to make iodine. His first impression of Tìree was less than favourable,

The accommodation is execrable, nothing but fish and eggs to eat and no stimulant of any kind sold in the whole island. No place ever disgusted me so much.

Life as a kelp gatherer was hard,

[The kelp gatherers] are badly treated in many a way. They very often have to get up at midnight [for the spring low tides] and go away and pick up tangle out of the surf when the sea is washing over them.

Donald MacLean, 65, Kilmoluaig.

The factory closed in 1901.

Croitearachd Crofting

Nowadays most of the land on Tìree is split up into crofts. It has not always been like this, however. The map on your left shows the way the island was before 1800.

This map was drawn by a surveyor called Turnbull in 1768. At that time the island was divided into *clachain*, or farm towns. Some of these *clachain* were quite large. 163 people lived in Heylipol alone. Tenants paid rent to a tacksman who, in turn, rented the land from the Duke. Around the *clachan* the fields were divided into thin strips – the runrig system. The marks of these old fields can still be seen under the *machair* around the island, for example the third hole of the golf course! A good example of an old *clachan* is at Baugh, between the doctor's surgery and the river.

Several *clachain* behind Ben Hough were buried by sand in the 19th century and no longer exist.

The 5th Duke of Argyll, living in London and keen to make more money from his estate, decided to break up the island into smallholdings or crofts, changing the face of Tìree. The tacksmen were removed and,
Such as were formerly tenants to have from 6 to 10 arable acres, and those who were only cottars [islanders with no land] and tradesmen to have 4 arable acres...I am doing all I can to...make every man independent of his neighbours.

Duke's instruction to his factor, 1803.

The new crofters were given a year's free rent to compensate them for the work of moving. While other Highland landlords were clearing their land for sheep, here many islanders were being encouraged to stay.

At the same time he also created some large farms, such as Hynish and Hough, where there was money to be made from sheep

As the nineteenth century wore on, however, conditions on Tìree became less benign. The Duke's most notorious factor, John Campbell, *am baillidh dubh*, could be ruthless.

Hugh MacLean, Mannal, who was blind, was disgracefully evicted [around 1864]. Having no house to go to, he was still in his own home. The factor then sent men to strip the roof off...He then removed to the barn...The same men were then sent back to strip the barn too, and the poor blind man with his crippled wife and no sons to help him, as of the two sons he had two were drowned some time before, and his only other son was insane in an asylum, was cruelly turned out and left by the roadside.

Napier Commission Report, 1886.

And many islanders, the cottars, still had no land at all. They often lived by the shore but were sometimes allowed to grow a strip of potatoes on the crofters' land in exchange for their labour.

By the 1880s agitation for land rights was building up on the island, as it was in Ireland and the Highlands of Scotland generally. In 1883 Lord Napier held a hearing

in Kirkapol church to allow the crofters to put their case. One witness, Angus Munn from Heanish, went into the witness box to say,
We have been forcibly deprived of our holdings of two crofts...to make room for another party who got into the factor's favour...our demands are – more land, fixity of tenure, fair rent and compensation for improvements.

In July 1885 the *Cairnsmuir*, a boat loaded with wine and spirits, ran aground off Tìree. When excisemen came to claim the cargo, however, there was suspiciously little in the hold and large groups of angry islanders shouted at them from the shore.

The flashpoint came when Greenhill farm fell vacant in the spring of 1886 and there was a widespread feeling that the land should be divided into crofts. Islanders were furious when Lachlan MacNeill from Vaul was given the farm, especially as he was the brother of the crofters' leader on the island. Neighbours turned their own cattle onto the ground in defiance of the estate.

A force of 37 policemen was sent to Tìree to serve warrants on 51 men. But the police were met by a hostile crowd and forced to retreat to the Scarinish hotel. The Duke complained that the island had surrendered "to the rule of savagery." A week later two warships anchored off Scarinish and 250 marines and 40 policemen disembarked. The soldiers set up camp behind the butcher's shop in Scarinish. They mounted a round the clock guard on the well there to prevent it being poisoned. It is called *Tobar nan Saighdear*, well of the soldiers, to this day. However, relations between the invaders and islanders improved. A sports day was held and the Tìree team famously defeated the marines in the tug-of-war.

The reporter for the *Scotsman* tried to steal a march on his rivals by sending his copy to the mainland on the Sabbath using a homing pigeon but the bird was attacked by seagulls and the report was destroyed.

Eventually arrest warrants were issued to eight men who were tried in Edinburgh and sentenced to four to six months in prison. MacNeill was given the Greenhill farm that had sparked the unrest.

The Tìree crofters had the last laugh, however, when the Liberal Government passed the Crofters Act of 1886. This gave crofters fair rents, security of tenure, and the ability to pass on crofts to who they wanted. New crofts were also created by the estate by breaking up the farms of Balephetrish, Hynish, Baugh and Heylipol to give to islanders returning from the First World War.

Today on Tìree's 8,822 hectares there are 292 crofts, with 92 active crofters, and 6 farms. Almost all the island is still owned by the Duke of Argyll. The only exceptions are the Reef which was taken over during the last war and is now owned by Highlands and Islands Airports Ltd., the Church of Scotland glebe, private house sites and a minority of crofts which have been bought. Almost a third of the crofters are pensioners.

Tìree is astonishingly fertile. It is one of the most productive crofting areas in Scotland. The *machair* grassland on Tìree is high in calcium, which makes it ideal for

the growth of young lambs and cattle but not for fattening them before slaughter. Most beasts are therefore sent away to be 'finished' on mainland farms.

There are 3,200 head of cattle and 6,200 sheep. 7,300 lambs are sold every August, for an average price of £35 a head.

Siol an Eòrna Children of the Barley

We calculate that there are over 2 million people of Tìree descent around the world.

Even before 1800 there had been a trickle of emigration from the island as the British Empire colonized America and then Canada, Australia and New Zealand. But after the famine of 1846 the trickle became a flood as the Duke actively helped islanders emigrate from Tìree for the first time. In the next five years a quarter of the island's population left - 1,354 people.

There's the famous stone on the Druim Bhuidhe [the road between Heylipol and Cornaig]. Two men from Cornaig [Iain mòr Mairi Lachainn and Dòmhnall mòr], they'd been down at Island House and got their bounty [for emigrating] and they were walking home. They were emigrating the next day. One said to the other, "Well, we'll be away from here and we'll soon be forgotten." And the other one said, "Let's do something that they'll remember us by." The boulder there, twice the size of that table, and they rolled it over on its side. You'd need a JCB digger today to turn it over.

Hector MacPhail, Ruaig.

Canada

Most went to Canada. Some of the first arrivals had to endure appalling conditions. In the winter of 1849 a party of emigrants from Tìree had to camp on the quayside in Quebec because of the number of emigrants. 48 of them died from cholera.

Some emigrants were disappointed by the new land. The famous Tìree poet **John MacLean**, had emigrated from Caolas to Nova Scotia earlier in 1819 with his wife and three children. Coming from treeless Tìree, his dislike of the virgin forest was unmistakable.

It's no wonder that I'm gloomy living here...in the middle of the wilderness at Barney's River with nothing better than plain potatoes. Before I make a clearing and raise crops and tear the tyrannous forest up from its roots by the strength of my arms I'll be worn out and almost spent before my children have grown up.

The Canadian winters were also a shock to him.

However good your trousers are they'll do no good without two pairs of stockings and hair-like moccasins that are tightly laced with thongs. It's the latest fashion with us to wear the hide, hair and all, just as it comes stripped from the beast the day before.

Despite this gloomy start he went on to do very well in his new homeland.

Others also prospered. **Hugh MacLean** left a 12 acre croft in Ruaig in 1846, one of a family of ten. Fifteen years later he had a 100 acre farm in Kincardine, Ontario, with two bulls, six cows and 60 pounds of maple syrup.

Malcolm MacLean was born in 1844 in Kilmoluaig and emigrated to Ontario with his parents as a young child. He arrived in Vancouver in 1885. Within weeks he had been elected as the city's first mayor. Four weeks later the young city was destroyed by a huge fire. MacLean himself lost everything in the disaster but called a meeting of the city council in a tent. A colleague wrote,

I don't suppose in history that a city hall was built as rapidly as the one – a tent – I erected in five minutes the morning after the fire.

An obituary described Malcolm and his wife Margaret as being 'the real founders of the third city of Canada.'

The family of **Joe Clark**, who became Canada's youngest Prime Minister in 1979, had emigrated from Tìree in 1850.

Australia

Archibald Campbell left Cornaig, where his father was the miller, in 1850 and sailed from the Clyde bound for Melbourne, keeping a diary of his voyage.

October 29. We had a wedding on board the Sydney this day. One of our cabin passengers took notion of one of the steerage passengers to marry her and in a very short time he put it to effect. We had a good spread today about it, dancing and singing songs till they were tired.

October 30th. Very calm and hot. Going about barefooted with only trousers and shirt perspiring, sitting in the coolest place in the ship

November 4th. Fourteen vessels in sight all day. We are about 450 miles from the line [equator].

November 12th. This is Halloween [Old Calendar] with my dear friends in Tìree. It awakens deep thoughts within me, but there was no way of banishing them, but going to God with a loaded heart and poured out in His presence.

December 7th. I saw a large albatross today and I set the line and had the pleasure of fishing this large bird. I took six quills out of his wings and the captain tied a sheet lead round his neck tied with copper wire ...and we cast the brute overboard again.

January 1st 1851. I gave the captain and the rest of the gents a first foot about half past twelve this morning. I treated them with a Highland whisky from a Highland man out of a Highland glass, as the captain used to say, and also the rest of the steerage passengers.

January 3rd. My bed companion was complaining very much this three days back that I was bruising him every night with the heaving of the vessel.

January 17th. We came alongside a white sandy beach about twenty miles long. It puts me in mind of our own sandy beaches at home. Landed next morning at Yarra Yarra wharf.

The voyage under sail from Greenock to Australia had taken 106 days.

For others the new lands brought tragedy. A grave found in the Queensland bush reads.

*In loving memory of **Donaldina McLean**, only daughter of Dugald and Mary McKinnon. Born on the Island of Tìree 1880, died 1886.*

It is said that the child was restless in the night. In the morning a snake was found in her bed and the girl was dead.

For at least one Tìree man emigration was not a matter of choice. **Hector MacL***** was convicted in 1857 of the murder of his wife in Earnal. He was transported to Western Australia as a convict, getting his ticket of leave seven years later. Within months he had died of TB.

New Zealand

Sir Donald MacLean left Kilmoluaig in 1838 and emigrated to New Zealand. His Highland upbringing gave him an understanding of the Maori culture and he rose to become the Minister of Native affairs in the government of the colony.

Patagonia

Large sheep farms were being opened up in the 1880s in Patagonia on the southern tip of South America. **Donald Paterson** from Balinoe was one who went to seek his fortune there.

They were looking for men that were used to working with sheep. They used to come here recruiting, men that were used to hardship and living in lonely places, you see...the father of Iain Dheòrsa [Iain Paterson, Crossapol] was born in Patagonia. He was seven years old when he came back to Tìree. He could speak Gaelic and Spanish and not a word of English.

Hector MacPhail

An Cogadh The Wind That Shook the Barley

Iain mac Eachainn Bhàin, John MacLean, a shepherd in Hough in the 19th century, was famous as a seer, someone who could see into the future. One of his prophecies appears to predict the Second World War and the building of the RAF base on the island,

There is a great war coming soon...In the Atlantic Ocean narrow iron vessels will travel underwater, letting loose narrow silver fish that will blow the large vessels to the bed of the ocean...Many armed forces will come to the island. They will live in strange houses [Nissen huts] and large birds will rise up and lie down on the plain of the Reef. Steering these strange birds will be people with noses like pigs' snouts.

World War One had a terrible impact on Tiree. Of the 290 islanders who served in the conflict, 66 died. But the Great War was, for most islanders, a distant battle, fought in the trenches of Europe. In contrast, the Second World War brought Tiree right into the front line as Britain struggled to defend its supply lines across the Atlantic from attack by German U-boats.

I remember the day the war started as well as today. And I'll tell you...it poured with rain, and I've never seen rain like it, before or after. And it was Sunday, and every place got dark with rain...People were terrible frightened, especially old folk, and young folk as well, although they weren't showing it the same way the old folk were showing it, because they were talking about the old war, the 1914 war, that's what it was.

David McClounnan, Balephuill.

Many islanders volunteered.

Norrie Thomson, he was a farm worker with Teac Munn [in Baugh]. He volunteered and went away into the army. I remember him back, and even I as a young boy was amazed. You know, he was a slow-walking, typical farm labourer, and he arrived home in uniform after his square-bashing training about three or four months later. And, oh man! You should have seen him walking along the road going to Scarinish in his uniform. Shoulders back, stomach in, chest out! He went through the war successfully too."

Angus Munn, Heanish.

In 1940 the Ministry of War took over the grass landing strip on the Reef and three large runways were built. The RAF base opened in November 1941, its aircraft supporting the Atlantic convoys by hunting submarines and dropping supplies for ships in trouble.

For some Tiree was a posting to the end of the world. But many servicemen came to love the island and are still in touch with us. George Holleyman was a military policeman here. He had been a distinguished archaeologist before the war and found an amazing number of flints and pottery pieces, which he left to An Iodhlann when he died.

The most important unit on Tiree was 518 Squadron, which flew Halifax bombers 500 miles out into the Atlantic to collect weather information. Their 11 hour trips took them up to 20,000 feet and then down to sea level. It was dangerous work with the crews having to combat ice on the aircraft's wings and enormous waves. In 1944 alone the squadron lost eight planes and 64 crew. The information they gathered, however, pinpointed the one day on which the D-Day invasion of France could go ahead in June 1944.

There were a number of accidents. In 1944 two Halifaxes collided in cloud while undertaking a test run before their night flight. One of the airmen killed that day was Leonard Revilliod, grandson of Tomáš Masaryk, the founder of Czechoslovakia.

I was on the top of Ben Hynish and it was a lovely day. And one got up off the 'drome there and the other one was coming in and they were straight in bee-line. I was seeing them before they crashed and they seemed to come so close to each other that they tipped wings...and the next thing the two of them went up in flames and you could see the wheels with the tyres burning and falling right to the ground...one of the engines fell at the pillar box at Island House.

David McClounnan.

During the war there were a number of Italian prisoners of war on Tiree. These were held in wooden huts in Crossapol but were generally free to walk around the island.

They started digging there [a water pipe at Balephuill]. It was prisoners and you couldn't see right along the place, they were so near to each other...There were about four or five hundred of them...I remember I was shepherding out there at Hugh MacLean's. I used to take the cattle down from there, and this [POW] bloke came...I had a watch on a chain, and he was talking to me in Italian and I was talking to him in Gaelic. Eventually he gestured that he also had a watch on a chain and the watch wasn't wound. I knew then that he wanted to know the time.

David McClounnan.

A Home Guard unit was established on the island to defend Tiree from possible attack. But in contrast to the fictional 'Dad's Army', when challenged to a shooting match by the RAF,

We gave them beans...I tell you it was a great day...We hammered them soft. "I'm not surprised," said Jock Graham [the estate's game keeper]. "You buggers were born with guns in your hands." You know – poaching!

Hugh MacLean, Barrapol.

Mines were another hazard at the shore. One came in below the banker's house in Scarinish. It was inspected by the authorities and found to be safe.

That's all we needed, 'cause on the way home we were like mice on top of a lump of cheese! I remember myself bending the prongs we wanted to take as trophies and we had big boulders hammering away at these pins on the mine. A few weeks later a gale refloated the mine and it crashed against the rocks, exploding violently...The key fell out of the door of Adavale, half a mile away!

Hugh MacKinnon, Baugh.

The Second World War was one of the great turning points of Tìree's history. Tarmac roads and three huge runways built. More than two hundred islanders left Tìree to serve in the forces. 2,000 servicemen and women from England, Australia, Poland and Canada were stationed on the island. English suddenly took over from Gaelic as the dominant language. Films were shown and many wartime romances started. *There were dances everywhere, it was marvellous...I remember getting up and it was the tango and this RAF bloke lifted me up...He was really good...They could do things like that...They were more sophisticated, Oh yes!*

Janet Wilson.

An Cuain The Sea

Surrounded by the restless Atlantic Ocean, the sea has given Tìree its fertility, its people their food and livelihood and shaped the island's weather.

The earliest Mesolithic visitors to the island lived at the shore and lived largely on sea food, including fishing from boats.

However, commercial fishing by islanders began, somewhat unenthusiastically, only in 1787.

There were several companies of natives employed, and though of little experience, they caught at one letting of 200 hooks, from 30-80 cod and ling...there are yearly companies from Barra...having more experience are more successful than our own men...They do not in this district pursue fishing with spirit.

Old Statistical Account 1792.

The 5th Duke of Argyll tried to encourage his tenants to take up fishing. He instructed his factor in 1801 that,

Each boat's crew to be assisted with an advance of £10 or hooks and lines to that value...Malcolm MacDonal appears to have made spirited exertion already as a fisher, and has been unfortunate in losing a boat and lines. He should be encouraged to renew his exertions and I allow you to give him £10 to set him a-going.

A major problem was the lack of good harbours on Tìree, which forced islanders to use fishing boats small enough to drag up onto the beach. So in 1847 small piers were built at The Green, West Hynish, Balemartine, Baugh and Milton.

The prize was the shoals of white fish - cod and ling - which were salted and sent to the growing cities of Britain. By the 1881 Census 171 islanders said they were fishermen with 3 others boat builders. The island also attracted a number of seasonal fishermen from the east coast of Scotland. Brock and The Green both got their names from these men.

Salt ling were exported from the island...The rocks down here were covered with fish drying in the sun. When they were dry they would make big bales of them tied with string and a big boat was coming in once a year for them...There was always someone sitting nearby, someone paid to keep the seagulls away by shouting or throwing stones.

John Fletcher, Balemartine.

Life as a fisherman was hard.

They were tough, going out in the morning with maybe a bottle of milk and perhaps a scone in a piece of paper and that was their lot for the day until they came back at night, and I bet there wasn't much when they got home. These people were poor. They had nothing.

John Fletcher.

The classic Tiree skiff was around twenty feet long and rigged by a dipping lug sail, an old fashioned rig but comparatively safe in the open sea. These boats still race off Scarinish in the July regatta, one of the last places in Britain where they can still be seen.

However, by 1900 the 'white gold' around Tiree was disappearing due to over fishing and competition from large steam trawlers. By the start of the Second World War the industry had moved elsewhere.

Although Donald MacKinnon, Brock, was described as 'lobster fisherman' in 1861, commercial lobster fishing only developed on Tiree after the railway came to Oban in 1880 as lobsters have to be shipped alive. They were sent by train to Billingsgate market in London wrapped in seaweed.

In the 1880s there were over thirty schooners and smacks owned by Tiree men
These vessels traded over a wide expanse and their cargoes were many and varied. They shipped coal from the Clyde, perhaps to Lerwick or the Isle of Man, cattle and sheep from all the Hebridean islands to mainland ports and horses and ponies from Tiree to the north of Ireland.

Hector Macphail.

The most famous of these was the *Mary Stewart*, whose remains lie in Scarinish harbour. Her last voyage was in 1942.

The Merchant Navy was the biggest employer of Tiree men for the last 150 years. About 1930 there were over twenty Tiree men sailing as captains with Robertson's of Glasgow. There were at least ten Tiree men captain with the Baron line, Hugh Hogarth's company. These were known throughout the oceans of the world as 'Hungry Hogarths' – he ran his ships on a shoestring. And Donaldson's line of Glasgow was so full of Tiree men they were known as the 'Tiree Navy'.

Hector MacPhail.

Perhaps the most famous Tiree skipper was Donald MacKinnon, from Heanish. He captained the clipper *Taeping* from China in 1886 in the annual race to bring the first tea of the season to London. He beat the second boat by just half an hour after a voyage of 99 days.

"Never turn your back on the sea" was a lesson drummed into young islanders. The dangers of the open sea claimed many Tiree sailors' lives. The worst tragedy, known as *Fuadach Bhail' a' Phuill*, was in July 1856. A fine day enticed seven boats from West Hynish to the Skerryvore fishing banks. A sudden storm scattered the fleet and nine men drowned. Two boats were driven to Islay and one to Coll, where it came ashore with the skipper dead at the helm. Two Tiree women, Isabella Black and Mary Campbell, were blamed for the disaster.

Neither of them had any great love for their husbands and they wanted to get rid of them...And the people were casting it up against these two women that it was them that caused the wind, because a witch is able to do just about anything.

Donald Sinclair, West Hynish.

Skerryvore lighthouse was built by Alan Stevenson in 1842 after thirty ships were wrecked on its reefs in 50 years. The buildings in Hynish, which were used by the workforce and lighthouse men, can still be seen. We recommend you visit the Skerryvore museum in Hynish.

The lack of a good natural harbour was, and still is, Tiree's biggest lack. Scarinish harbour was built before 1786. The first steamer to visit Tiree regularly from the Clyde was the *Dunara Castle* in 1875, but with no pier, boats had to lay off Scarinish while a small skiff brought passengers and cargo to land.

Very often it turns on the number of young men present and willing to take a hand, and with two men to each oar they assist the agent of MacBrayne to get the boat out of the narrow straits of Scarinish harbour to the steamer.

Lady Victoria Campbell, sister of the Duke of Argyll.

After years of political pressure Gott Bay pier was built in 1913. Cars had to be put in slings and winched onto the pier. The end-loading 'ro-ro' terminal was built in 1992.

An t-side Tiree's Weather

With its sunshine and wind our weather brings many people to Tiree. The island has more sunshine than most parts of the country - 1,400 hours a year. The sunniest day on record was July 9th 1936 when there were 16.8 hours of sunshine. The hottest day, 26 C, was on July 6th 1991.

Tiree is surrounded by the warm waters of the Gulf Stream and the island is mild in winter and cool in summer. Sea temperatures are at their lowest, 7 C, in March and highest, 13 C, in September. It does snow here every few years but it rarely lies for long. The coldest temperature on record, -7 C, was on December 12th 1985. Loch Bhasapol was frozen over so that boys could play football on it in 1928 and 1963.

The island, however, has no shelter from the Atlantic weather systems. There are gales here 34 days a year here compared with 4 in Glasgow. The strongest wind on record, 118 miles per hour, was on January 15th 1968.

During the big gale in 1953 there was a man in Kilmoluaig, Alasdair Eachainn, who was another man who was good at telling stories...He was struggling home from Balevullin in the dark...and a corn stack went past him. A lot of corn stacks were knocked over that night...He said, 'I was asking around the next day who'd lost a corn stack?' Nobody had lost one. 'I reckon it came down from Barra!' he said.

But the wind gives as well as takes. There are plans for a community wind turbine in Ruaig and Tiree has some of the best beaches for windsurfing in Europe, hosting the 2007 PWA World Championship.

The then headmaster at Cornaig school, D.O. MacLean, filed his first weather report in 1926. The barometer was on his staircase. This station was further developed by the RAF during the war and Tiree has gone on to become one of the most important weather stations in the UK, its name familiar to insomniacs who listen to the Shipping Forecast.

The station became automatic on the last day of July 2000 with the sad loss of five Met Office jobs.

"You must have mixed feelings about the station going automatic."

"Yes. I enjoy Tiree, and it means the fact that I no longer will be employed to work here has caused some problems personally. But it's progress, it's the advances in technology creating this difficulty for people in all walks of life. It just so happens that it has reached mine."

Ray Sharp, one of the leaving Met. Office observers, talking to Maggie Campbell.

Before the days of the professional weather forecast, islanders 'read' the weather themselves.

Casan fon ghrèin, literally feet under the sun, are a sign of bad weather to come. Rocks gleaming on the side of Ben Hynish are a sign of rain and if you can see the flashing of a far away lighthouse like Heisgeir it will soon be stormy.

The old people use to remark on the formation of the clouds from the horizon and spreading upwards in the evening. Their alignment indicated the wind direction the following day. It was called An Craobh [the Tree].

Alasdair Sinclair,

Brock.

If the new moon is 'lying on its back' it's a bad sign. Starlings gathering on power lines or a flock of birds wheeling in the air ahead of a weather system are sure pointers to rain.

One of the first household gadgets to measure the weather was in Kilkenneth. *And that's another thing the tailor [Lachie MacKinnon, Kilkenneth] had, since I remember – a Swiss Cottage - and it was on the mantelpiece in the workshop at the end of the house – a man and a woman. When it was going to rain the man would come out with an umbrella, and when it was going to be dry, the woman would come out...and the old people in these days were, especially at harvest time, to see how the ones that was in the Swiss Cottage, who was out. They would get hold of Lachie anywhere [and ask] 'Who's out today?'*

Hector Kennedy, Heylipol talking to Eric Cregeen from the School of Scottish Studies in 1974.

Na taighean tughaidh Below the Thatch

Tiree's beautiful thatched houses are unique. Using what came to hand and three thousand years of local knowledge islanders have developed a design that stands up to winds of over 100 miles an hour and driving rain.

This model shows what a traditional Tiree house looks like. Most houses face east - *cùl ri gaoith, aghaidh ri grèin*, back to the wind, face to the sun. The six foot double walls are made of rough stones and to keep the wind from whistling through the cracks, the space between the two walls is filled with a sand mixture called *an glutadh*.

The roof sits on the inside wall and the rain runs down between the two walls. This left a wide *tobhta*, or wall head, where grass and flowers grew, sheep grazed and dogs lay in the sun. Timbers for the roof were the most valuable part of the house. Since there are no trees on Tiree the Duke of Argyll allowed islanders to sail to another of his estates on Loch Sunart to cut wood. Eventually he became fed up with the amount they were taking.

My Chamberlain continues to complain of abuses committed on my woods by the people of Tiry and says that in a few years they will utterly destroy them.

The Duke of Argyll, writing to his factor on Tiree in 1786.

On top of the timbers lie 1,000 *sgrothan*, or turves, laid upside down. These are cut from the *sliabh*, or moor, where the heather roots give them more strength. A man working alone can cut this amount in five days.

Over this base the thatch is laid. On Tiree islanders use *muran*, or marram grass, which grows on the sand dunes at the shore. A man can take a week to collect enough for a house. Houses needed re-thatching every two years. There is now a shortage of *muran* on Tiree.

The roof is not fastened onto the walls. Instead it is shaped like an aircraft's wing with a steeper curve at the back causing the wind to push the roof downwards.

The front and inside of the house used to be whitened with lime made by baking limpet shells overnight. Inside the floor was made of mud and clay. To tread it down sheep would sometimes be herded into the new building for a night, or a piper would play for the neighbours to dance. Every morning the woman of the house sprinkled the floor with *siaban*, clean white sand from the shore

Inside there were three rooms. To the left was the kitchen/living room, to the right a *seòmar*, or bedroom, and between the two a little room called the *clòsaid*. Children sometimes slept in the rafters and houses like this one could sometimes be home to as many as twelve people.

By the middle of the nineteenth century islanders started to use tarred felt instead of thatch for the roof and this style is still widely used on Tiree. The term 'black house'

is slightly insulting and refers to an older style of house with no chimney where the smoke from a central fire escaped through the thatch. The last house like this was in Moss in the 1850s.

Do visit the thatched house museum in Sandaig owned by the Hebridean Trust.