

‘From a Needle to an Anchor’



The story of Tiree’s shops.

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In 1863, E.C.Stanford, a young English chemist who had come to the island to set up the ‘Glassary’ factory in Middleton, wrote in his diary:

“I found every supply very bad and dear, the people poor and famished, and the storekeepers flourishing.”

Tiree has changed profoundly in the last 150 years, and the story of Tiree’s shops gives a vivid picture of this. We do not know exactly how many shops there were on Tiree when Stanford arrived in 1863. Almost certainly there were more than there are today.

Transport was usually by foot, and so shops were set up all over the island within walking distance of most people.



“Although there were many shops, there was also much walking. Every Friday, unless the weather was very wild my aunt Annie used to walk the seven miles from Brock to Scarinish and back with two shopping bags of groceries.” Alasdair Sinclair, Brock.

It was also easier then to set up a shop. You needed a room in the house, and some capital to buy goods, but there was little red tape.

“No word of sell-by dates in these days.”

“Oh, it was unheard of! Everything was in bulk, and it was there until it was finished . . . the cheese, for instance . . . when it started to get the green mould . . . you just cut it off...it’s quite harmless.” Alasdair Straker talking to Margaret Campbell.

No shops, or even the butchers’ slaughterhouses, had running water. But the older people asked about this insist that there are more germs around today than there were then.

The heyday of the Tiree shops was probably between the wars, when there were over thirty five. Today we have five, with another four of a new phenomenon, the craft shop.

In the days before the Second World War, money was scarcer, and many crofters' families were very self-sufficient. They would have their own milk, churn butter and sometimes make cheese. There would be potatoes, one or two vegetables from a garden, fresh or salted fish, and plenty of eggs. Shops were therefore much simpler than they are today, where the Co-op in Scarinish displays over 4,500 different items!

"In those days, people in Balevullin, and in general on Tiree, were mainly self-sufficient."
Iain MacDonald, Balevullin.

The late Mabel Kennedy remembered the food supplies in a typical household in Balephuill around 1910:

- A 42 lb cheese from Coll (bought at 1 shilling a pound)
- A large box of hard caraway biscuits (known as cabin or ship's biscuits) from Tobermory
- A 5 lb box of tea from A.B. Cochrane's of Glasgow
- A half a barrel of salt herrings from Loch Fyne
- A *geineal*, or chest divided into three sections for *mìn-fhlùr* (wheat flour), *mìn-choirce* (oatmeal) and *mìn-Innseanach* (maize meal) bought from travellers (like Cook and Blair's) once a year.

"The flour and meal were bought in 140 lb. sacks, known as poca bolla, from MacFarlane Shearer's traveller once a year. When the bag was opened there was usually a copy of the Christian Herald sewn in the bag at the top of the flour... Two hundred weight bags of sugar were made of hessian, and the flour bags of strong cotton. They were much used to make work aprons, bed ticks, and pillow cases, linings of trousers, and (coated with boiled linseed oil) for oilskin jackets and trousers. King's Own flour bags were of particular quality."
Alasdair Sinclair, Brock.



**The co-op van at Vaul in the 1940s.
L-R: Catriona MacKinnon; Margaret Doig; Lorna and
Morag Lee; Neil MacNeill.**

"I remember as a wee girl [in the 1930s] it was a novelty to get fruit on the island. I remember my father bringing home bananas and oranges [from the mainland]."
Maggie Campbell.

Children did much of the shopping (something that is uncommon today), going down to the shop with a list of messages, and perhaps some eggs to pay part of the bill. This was because the shops were close at hand, it was safe, and there was less choice, so mistakes were less likely. At several of the shops (again, some more than others) one could buy things on tick until the next cattle sale.

If you couldn't go to the shop yourself, or wanted some heavier items, there were the vans. At first these were horse-drawn, but after the First World War, cars and lorries began to be used to allow shops to increase what today would be called their 'customer base'.

Donald Sinclair (*Dòmhnall Neill Oig*) wrote a poem *Oran na Van* to commemorate the first van on the island around 1882.

According to Hector Cameron in *Na Baird Thirisdeach*, "*It always announced its arrival at any station by a loud blast on a trumpet. Hence the allusion in the song to Rìgh na Mòintich mistaking it for the distress signal of a ship ashore.*

"Early on Wednesday when it reached Greenhill the heavens heard of its arrival: Rìgh na Mòintich [the nick-name of a well-known crofter in Moss] was putting on his boots when he heard the music which was in no way faint; he then jumped and shouted 'Get up! Hooray! Children, a large vessel has arrived on Cladach a' Chroagan [Balephetrish beach] – you will miss out unless you get there'."

"When it left Greenhill and made for the west it caused fear among the people of Cùl Bhòid [near Main Road Farm, Balephuill]. Said the Iasgair [a nickname] 'It is the Devil with his iron wheels and brass and all the rest of it. But come back to your senses and calm down and I'll go for the 'Apostle Paul' [another nickname] – he will make a prayer to guide us and he will steer a close course through the smoke.'"

(translation by Flora MacPhail).

Food was bought in bulk by the shop-keeper, and then divided and served to the customer, usually as they waited.

"Everything was like that, the butter, the bacon, the cheese, everything was cut according to the amount you wanted, and put on the scales. The sugar came in huge big bags, and there was just a wee scoop into a brown paper bag." Alasdair Straker talking to Margaret Campbell.

Some shops were great meeting places in the days when there were few public buildings except the schools and churches, especially Dan MacArthur's, Hugh MacPhail's and *Eachann Sheumais*'. The young would meet outside, at *ceann a' bhuth*, at the gable end of the shop, while the men would sit inside in the warmth for a *cèilidh* by the light of a paraffin or Tilley lamp. Some shop-keepers, it has to be said, were happier than others to stay up late into the evening with their customers, but it must have helped that they all lived above or beside their businesses.

The late Hector MacPhail used to tell this story:

There used to be a *mullachag*, a big round of cheese, at the end of the counter in *Buth Dhan*, in Scarinish. Old men used to gather in the shop in the evening for a *cèilidh*, and Dan MacArthur, the proprietor, would sit behind the counter.

One man, *Seòras*, from Scarinish, had a habit of marching by the counter while he told a story. When he reached the cheese, he would quickly look to see if Dan was watching, and, if the shop-keeper's attention was elsewhere, he would pounce on any loose bits of cheese left over from the day's business.

One evening *Dòmhnall Òg*, another of the old men, cut a few shavings of 'Lifebuoy' soap and put them around the cheese. When *Seòras* came to his evening snack, there was a great foaming at the mouth and much laughter!



The Scarinish shop in 1910. L-R: butcher Calum MacLean, co-owner Hugh MacArthur, gamekeeper Peter Anderson.

Most of the shops were open at all hours, more like the corner shops in cities today. Only on Sundays, Christmas Day, and New Year's Day were they closed.

"Notices of forthcoming events appeared in the shop and post office windows. They almost always ended with D.V (God Willing)". Alasdair Sinclair, Brock

"Did they keep strict shop hours or could you go there at night?"

"No, no, go there at 10 o'clock at night, if there was someone short of tobacco or something like that. There was no problem in these days." Hugh MacKinnon, Baugh.

Supplies were delivered by lorry from the pier to the shops. Alasdair Straker used to help Willie Bunting on his rounds.

"The Loch Ard brought a lot of cargo and it used to come from the Kingston Dock and straight to Tiree...that was in the days when all the bulk stuff came straight from Glasgow, unlike the ferry which always came from Oban..."

"I was round about the age of 13. I did most of the driving, under age driving. The local policeman here, Mr. MacDonald, and I were very good friends...whenever he saw Willie's lorry, he told me this many a time...he found something 'interesting' to look at, as he used to say, elsewhere!"

"How it stuck together, I'll never know. Because it was one of those lorries with double wheels at the back and it was very rare that all the wheels were there!" Alasdair Straker

There were shops in every part of the island.

Caolas

There was a shop before 1900 on *Mullach nan Ceall* run by *Ceit, nighean Phàraig*.

Ruaig

In the 1920s and 30s there was a Ruaig Agricultural Co-operative Society who ordered materials like fencing and feeding direct and in bulk for crofters. Their secretary was Alex MacLean, Caolas (*Alasdair Neill Oig*), and another leading light was Charles MacKinnon, *Tor a' Bhaile (Tearlach Eoghainn)*.

Alasdair MacLean of Ruaig, born in 1821, is recorded as a 'shopkeeper and boatman' in the 1881 Census. He had two daughters. Catriona, unusually for a woman, had her own boat and fished for lobsters and herring, while Charlotte concentrated on the shop, which was known as *Buth Theairleat*.

Charlotte was blessed with a strong singing voice, and taught singing in Ruaig School. Because of this she earned the nickname *Cailleach an 'Doh'*. The shop closed down around 1938.



Buth Theairleat in Ruaig.

Mrs. Kate Lamont (*Ceit Lachainn*), wife of the postman *Eoghan Iain*, ran a small shop with the sub-post office for the east end. It closed in the early 1950s.

There was also an older shop in *Taigh Poll a' Chrosain* (between *Sgibinnis* and *Dùn Mòr a' Chaolais*) run by *Bean Dhòmhnaiill Chamshron*.

Charles Lamont (*Tearlach Iain Thearlaich*) was a coal merchant in Ruaig.

Salum

The most famous shop in the east end was run by Malcolm MacLean, universally known as *Calum Salum*.

Angus MacIvor composed this verse about him:

*And then there's Calum Salum
Whom you must not pass by,
For he's greater by far
Than your Copeland and Lye.*

[a prestigious store in Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow].

He started the business in 1938, and expanded after the War into an old RAF hut from the airfield. *Buth Chaluim Shalum* sold a wide range of goods, helped by his good contacts, which were particularly useful during the war.

He sold a wide range of food and hardware - tins of food, paraffin, methylated spirits for lighting the Tilley lamps, crockery, Calor gas cookers, radios and their batteries and even larger farm equipment including tractors. He was also the first man to sell bottled gas on the island.

"There would be Calum sitting in his shop with a Tilley lamp. The War was on, but Calum had so many acquaintances with his letting [from his guest -house], he was able to get things no-one else could get. Calum would issue us with chocolate Digestives...these were treasures to us in those days. Then we would walk home again [to Brock] under the moonlight."

Duncan Grant



Inside Calum Salum's shop in the 1950s.

Sometimes dealing with the paperwork took second place to all Calum's other activities. Inside the house at Salum, which he ran as a boarding house with his step-father Lachie MacNeill, the dining table would often be covered with letters and accounts waiting to be dealt with. His favourite saying was: *"It's here, but where?"*

"Just outside the house at Salum stood a wooden shed which was Calum's shop and, if you knew where to find it, he sold everything: food, clothing, Wellingtons, paint, cattle food, toilet requisites, lamps, earthenware, buckets, fishing tackle, sweets, medicines and bottled gas.

"Our friend was not a tidy gentleman. He never cleaned out his old stock, or swept his floor. We did this for him every year. Seldom did he even man the shop. The till was always left open and many is the time I have gone behind the counter to serve the children with sweets..."

"When the day of our departure came, the grocery bill had grown to many pages. I would take out my cheque book to pay and from the 'deep litter' (his name for the clutter on his desk) he would take out the pad and flick over the pages, marvelling at the enormity of our appetites." Jean Brown, who brought groups of guides camping in Salum for many years.

Calum was also known for his beautiful handwriting and his stories.

“Calum was telling us one year that Tiree had been used as a garden for Iona by the monks. ‘They would not have a woman on the island’, he informed us. I believe they would not have a cow on the island either, on account of its being a woman too. They kept their cows on another island, and I’m thinking that they would have women there to look after the animals.’ His eyes suddenly began to twinkle. ‘I believe the monks were very good swimmers’ he said.”
Jean Brown

“Calum had working for him at that time an enormously heavy man called Big Neil. He was an infinitely gentle man who loved the myriad of daisies which flourish on Tiree. Calum was telling us one day that in spring, a sparrow hawk had chased an unfortunate victim, and it had flown for safety into the exhaust pipe of the tractor that Neil was using. ‘He’s a patient man, Big Neil,’ marvelled Calum. ‘He spent all morning taking off the exhaust, and he was that gentle, the wee sparrow flew out alive.’ ” Jean Brown.



Malcolm MacLean (Calum Salum) with his mother Christina MacNeill.

He also ran two cars in what became a very busy taxi service for the east end of the island.

Calum was amongst the first on Tiree to set up a windmill on his house to generate electricity and for many years he served as the District Councillor for the island. He was also a piper, and often used to play for dances down at Salum and from the rocks at the shore to the seals. The shop closed around 1971.

There was also a butcher’s shop in Salum run by Hugh MacLean (*Eoghann Alasdair mhic Eoghainn*). The family moved from *Crois*, Caolas, to the Ruaig school house, which was vacant at the time, when they were allocated a croft in Salum. For a while he butchered in a lean-to attached to the back of the school. Water had to be carried up from a pump at the roadside. Later, he built a slaughter house and shop at the front of the house now owned by his son Hugh Archie MacLean.

He usually slaughtered sheep once a week himself, but he would usually share a bullock with Archie MacLean, Kenovay, as there would be too much in the carcass for one shop to sell. When a pig was slaughtered, the whole family would turn to, carrying hot water from a 10 gallon iron boiler outside to scald the skin, so as to get the hair off.

Fridays and Saturdays were the busiest times of the week for the shop, especially in summer. His wife, Marion or *Mòr*, would serve in the shop and made white and black puddings.

During the war, the meat trade became highly regulated with ration books and coupons. Cartons of Fray Bentos corned beef and some carcasses from the mainland would be sent from Oban. At first Hugh used a horse and trap to deliver the meat, but later bought a two-seater car from Oban for £5, from which he removed the dickie seat at the back to store his goods.

After his death in 1949 the business was continued by his widow and his son Hugh until the latter decided to emigrate to Australia. It closed in 1950.

Brock

John MacKinnon (*Iain 'illeasbuig Oig*), Brock, the great grandfather of Alasdair Sinclair, had a shop in Brock in the 1850s. He also owned the schooner *Feannag*. When the family caught smallpox, the shop was shunned and subsequently closed.

Vaul

Three MacMillan sisters, Margaret, Sarah or Marion (*Seann Mhor*), and Mary were moved in 1876 from their 25 acre farm in Balinoe by the factor because there was no man in the family to work the land. This followed the deaths of their father Murdoch in 1874 and their uncle Lachlan the year after. In its place they were offered a small house at *an Uailleinich* ('Siversands'), Vaul with a shop attached. This had been run by a family of MacDonalds who emigrated to Canada.



Siversands, Vaul.

Though quite young and inexperienced, the sisters accepted the challenge. Margaret subsequently went to work on the mainland, and Sarah, with Mary's help ran the shop.

Sarah developed a reputation as a strict businesswoman. One young girl from Ruaig went to the shop around 1910 with a penny she had been given. The shopkeeper weighed out a measure of 'Black Stripes', and, seeing that they came to slightly more than a penny's worth, she picked one up, cracked it between her teeth, put half back on the scales and the other half back in the jar. By contrast, Mary would put in one or two extra sweets into the hands of her young customers.

Before each New Year, Sarah would go with John MacKinnon, Brock on his schooner to the Broomielaw, on the Clyde. There, she would engage a barrow porter and march off into the town, returning several hours later with her goods, including the prized currant cake (*Bun na Nollaige*).

“Like other shops, it carried a wide range of goods, including groceries, tobacco, paint, paraffin, needles, fishing flies, and bamboo fishing rods. The piocaich rods cost one shilling, and the carraig rods one and six. The latter were about four metres long after the last metre had been discarded because it was too springy.” Alasdair Sinclair.

John MacPhail, Balephuill, remembers bicycling there from Balemartine because it was the only shop on the island that sold Jews’ harps.

Mary married Hugh MacIntyre from Vault, and their daughter, Morag (*Morag na h-Uailleinich, Mor Og, or Morag nighean Eoghainn*) eventually took over the shop.

Besides running the shop and looking after her aged aunt, Morag also took in visitors during the summer months, and ran the MacIntyre croft in Vault with the help of James Curran. The shop was used as an assembly point for Scottish Airways passengers when the planes landed on *an Tràigh Mhòr* before 1939.

She also acted as secretary of the Vault Golf Club, and players had to pay their green fees to her. A map of the course (now in *An Iodhlann*) was on her shop wall.

She never had a bank account, and paid all her suppliers by Postal Order purchased at Ruaig Post Office. The shop closed around 1960 after serving the community for almost one hundred years.

Gott

James MacIntyre (*Seumas a’ Ghobhainn*) started a shop in his house in Gott around 1937. He often bought eggs from his customers at 6d. a dozen in exchange for groceries.



James MacIntyre's house in Gott.

Seumas a’ Ghobhainn . . . he sold everything, as they say, ‘from a needle to an anchor’, you know. If you wanted rope, the sioman ruadh, the rope they use for haystacks and that. That was the place to go for it.” Hugh MacKinnon.

He was a very kindly man, and Aneen Black remembers him walking on a drenching evening from his shop to her aunt's house in Ruaig with a jar, or *pige*, of paraffin when she had run out. He used to tease the children visiting the shop for sweets, saying, "*Bhasaich Bodach Rowntree*" ("Mr. Rowntree has died!").

The shop often looked somewhat disorganised to the casual visitor with boxes seemingly everywhere. But his wife, *bean Sheumais a' Ghobhainn*, was a shrewd businesswoman and knew exactly where everything was.

Seumas a' Ghobhainn himself was renowned for the state of his cars, which had usually seen plenty of service. His first car was bull-nosed Morris which had very worn tyres. His next car was a Morris Cowley, and it was little better.

His third car was an Austin 16, which had to be cranked to start. The engine backfired, injuring his arm. His son *Gilleasbuig* took over starting duties, and the same thing happened, and they were both in slings!

The wife (*Bean Dhòmhnaill mhic Ailein*) of Donald MacFadyen, who had the tenancy of the Scarinish shop around 1900, kept a few supplies from the main store at her house where Tullymet stands today.

Elizabeth Robertson ran a craft shop at the Glebe between 1976 and 1998.

Earnal

The great grandmother of Hugh MacLeod, Carrachan, had a shop on the west side of the main road.

Scarinish

Hector Cameron's 1930s guide book wrote that Scarinish had "*for generations the largest and most important store on the island*".

The first shopkeeper we have a record of is a John Campbell. A lament in *Na Baird Thirisdeach* has this introduction:

"John Campbell was a merchant in Scarinish. After seeing a drove of cattle to Doune, he proceeded to Glasgow to buy merchandise. On his way home he became ill at Greenock, and he was dead within three days. This was in 1817."

Towards the Glebe, on the road leading to Tullymet, there is a croft known as *Croit a' Bhuth* (the croft of the shop). It presumably went with the tenancy of the shop before they were broken up to form Scarinish farm.

After him no shopkeeper in Scarinish is mentioned in the Censuses until 1871, when Hugh MacKinnon 50 is recorded as a 'Grocer and shopman' employing two servants in a building with seven rooms. Presumably, therefore, the large shop which became known as *Buth Dhan*, had been built by then.

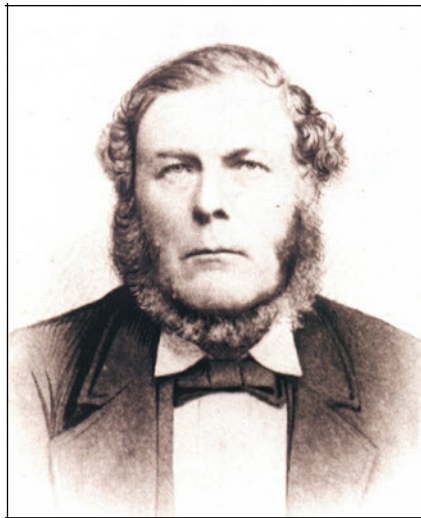
He was followed by a MacQuarrie, who also had a smack, the *Primrose*. It is not clear who this was, as no MacQuarrie appears in the 1881 or 1891 census living in Scarinish. The only MacQuarrie we have been able to find living in Tiree at the time is Lachlan MacQuarrie, who had Hynish farm. He had three sons, Murdoch (who had the Hynish shop – see later), Duncan, and Lachlan. One of these MacQuarries is said to have been sympathetic to the crofters' cause and paid the bail of the Tiree men arrested during the crofting disturbances of 1886.

This was marked in verse by John MacLean, the Balemartine bard, in his song '*Oran nam Priosanach*':

*'An Ionbharaora, toll dubh a' chruadail,
Gu'n dhunadh suas iad a Luan 'o Dhomhnach;
Ach bha de dh'uaisle 'an com MhicGhuair,
Nach biodh iad uair ann nam fuasgladh or iad.*

*In Inveraray, the black hole of hardship
They were incarcerated from Monday to Sunday.
But MacQuarrie had so much decency about him
That he saw to it that they would not remain there
For an hour if it were possible that gold would release them. [i.e. bailed out]
[translated by Flora MacPhail].*

Alan MacFadyen (1800-1891) had the tenancy of the farm and hotel in Scarinish. He also owned a smack that carried stone from the Ross of Mull to Hynish during the building of Skerryvore lighthouse in the 1830s. He had seven sons and five daughters. One, Margaret (*Magaidh Ailein*) moved to Middleton to take over the shop there.



**Donald MacFadyen, Scarinish, son of
Allan MacFadyen and Amelia Stewart.**

One of his sons Donald (*Dòmhnall mhic Ailein*), took over the tenancy of the Scarinish shop after MacQuarrie.

An Ciobar, a MacArthur, came from Tullymet in Perthshire to be a shepherd for the tenant of Hynish farm, *am Fear Haoidhnis*, in the second half of the nineteenth century. He had several children - John, Archie, Donald (Dan), Hugh, Teen Jessie and Seumas. Two of them, Hugh and Dan took over the main Scarinish shop, which became known as *Buth Dhan*, *Am Buth Sgairinis*, or *An Stòr Sgairinis*.

On returning from the front line of the First World War, where he had been a piper, Hugh married Jessie Duff from Hynish in the Reading Room in 1921. They moved to Balephetrish House in 1922, taking a croft reserved for returning servicemen.

“[My father (Eoghan a’ Bhuth) Hugh’s] main occupation was grocer. He had done his apprenticeship in Glasgow, then he was into the First World War and saw active service in France and Belgium, and then he came back, and he joined up with Uncle Donald in Scarinish.” Grace Campbell.

Dan lived above the Scarinish shop with his wife May Duff, Jessie’s sister.

“Dan a’ Bhuth was a chain smoker. He had an open packet of Capstan wedged in a drawer on the wall behind the counter and he lit each cigarette from the previous one, from opening time until the shop closed.” Alasdair Sinclair.

The old building was split into two, with the shop was on the west side and the post office on the east. Inside the shop were two long counters, where the shop assistants in white coats waited to serve you. On the east end of the building was *Taigh an t-salainn* (where the Bank is today), where coarse salt for preserving fish and meat was stored. There was no running water in the building, water being brought in from a pump outside and kept in a bucket.



The MacArthurs' shop in Scarinish in the 1930s.

“It was a friendly place, a meeting place. The shop was open till 8, 9 o’clock at night, just for ceilidhing, you know. It was lit and it was warm . . .

“They stocked everything, even materials, what they called the ‘Drapery Department’. Mind you, the money wasn’t there to purchase much, I can tell you that. And they had boots and shoes.

“In these days travellers or reps came in from different firms, even as far as Carlisle, for biscuits and so on, and they came in maybe once a year and visited and saw what was needed. They had to write it down in an order book.” Grace Campbell.

“Dan and Hugh were generous men, and often supplied necessities to customers ‘on tick’. They never enforced payment. They also supplied a whole ham to the Regatta Club as donation to the Ham Cutting competition.” Angus Munn.

The Co-op bought the shop around 1941. It ran two vans.

“These MacNivens were the most tight-fisted people in God’s creation. The only thing they spent money on was gravestones...now they were so mean, you remember Johnny ‘Nonian’. Now Johnny was the relieving driver in the Co-op van, and he was at the MacNiven house, you see. Now, you remember the way the women always went with a list, and the man of the van would write down the price of everything, and then tally it up.

“So, Johnny tallied everything up, and he had to be careful, because if there was any money short, that came out of the driver’s own pocket...So Johnny tallied everything up, and he gave old Miss MacNiven her change. And then he tallied it up again, and he had given her sixpence too much change.

“He went back to the door, rap, rap, rap! And he explained to her he had given her too much change, and she checked herself, and she agreed she had got sixpence too much.

“Damned if she would give him six pennies back. She went into the kitchen and came back with two of those big jam jars. Remember, you could go back to the shop and get threepence back on them!” Hector MacPhail.



**The Co-op in 1942.
L-R: Flora MacKinnon, Effie Wheeley
and manager Mr Robb.**

In 1948 disaster struck as a fire, which began in the back paraffin store, destroyed the shop. Nancy MacKinnon’s wedding cake, baked by the Co-op bakery in Glasgow, was on display in the front window of the shop at the time. MacLean, the manager, had asked her to take it home that night, but she said that she would take it home the next night.

“Then, very mysteriously . . . one night when we were all at an Arts Council concert at the Reef [Crossapol Hall] the whole place was gutted, but my uncle and aunt managed to get every article, including the clock, out of the post office end. The Co-op end, you couldn’t find a thing. And the next year [1949] my uncle and aunt died. It broke their spirit.” Grace Campbell.

“There was actually a dance in Crossapol that night . . . I remember coming home . . . you could see the glow, and it was some glow, it didn’t half go up . . . and when the roof went in, you could see it for miles away, you know the sparks . . . I was over there the day after. In fact it was my father that opened the safe out of the post office . . . and the stuff inside was charred but wasn’t actually completely destroyed . . . you’d see bean tins and tins of peas that had exploded . . .

"I remember, where they lived up top, the fireplaces were still in the wall, in fact there was an old stove hanging in place there.

"Old Dan and his wife were still living upstairs though at that time, but lucky enough his brother Hugh lived in Balephetrish, and there was some get together and they were up [there]. There was no-one hurt at all." Hugh MacKinnon.

Angus MacLean, Scarinish, driving past on the way home from the concert with Calum Salum, John Lachie MacInnes, Salum, and Donald Kennedy from *Am Port Bàn*, was one of the first on the scene.

He remembers climbing the outside stairs on the east gable of the building before the fire took hold. He broke down the door and started to salvage a few possessions. Someone brought a long ladder and put it to the upstairs window, and he used it as a slide to send things to safety, including a sewing machine. Eventually, as the floor started to sag, he was forced to retreat, only to be confronted on the way out by a furious *Bean Dhan*, who, unaware of the fire, wanted to know why they had broken into her house!

Duncan MacPhee next door was meanwhile lifting water from the well to keep the thatch of his house safe from the flying sparks.



The ruins of the Co-op taken in 1951. L-R: Neil MacDonald, Cathy MacNeill, Hugh MacKinnon, Teena MacNeill.

The week before the fire, the Co-op van, driven by Rob MacMaster, had visited Heylipol. Donald 'Denny' and *Ceit Eachainn* (Kate MacKinnon), from *Ceòsabh*, were waiting for him. "Have you got any matches?" asked Donald. Rob *Mòr* checked at the back of the van "I'm sorry, I've no matches this week", he reported back. The next week, after the fire, Rob stopped outside Heylipol Church again. "Have you any matches this week?" asked Donald again. No, there still were none in the van. "*Thuig mi sin (I didn't think you would!)*" replied Donald, with a twinkle in his eye.

After the fire, the business moved down to the 'Church Hall' at the pier, and then to a garage behind the Co-op itself, while the present day premises were built by John MacFarlane (*Iain Mòr MacPhàrlain*), Balemartine. The shop became self-service around 1972.

Calum MacLean (*Calum Buidsear*) from Moss opened a butcher's shop in Scarinish in the 1930s, although there had previously been a baker and a cobbler on the same site. This business was taken over by Donald and Nan MacLean in 1953.

Behind the butcher's shop there used to be a weighbridge for weighing carts filled with coal.

Margaret Robertson (MacDonald), from Skye set up shop (*Buth Mhagaidh*) followed by her daughter Mona. She was one of the first shops on the island (with Hugh MacPhail, Cornaigmore) to sell newspapers, and, taking advantage of her site on the road to the pier, she sold more souvenirs to tourists than most of the other shops. She also sold petrol from a 2,000 gallon tank in the ground on the east side of the shop.

"There was an awful lot of Irishmen [working on the Reef in the War] and they used to try and bribe us, give us a 10 shilling note for 5 Woodbines. They were on good money, but they couldn't get cigarettes [only servicemen were allowed into the NAAFI]. And they used to say to us, 'Go down to old Maggie's and ask her for 5 Woodbine'. And 5 Woodbine was only pennies, you could keep the change . . . I used to say, 'It's no use me going.' I mean, my father used to work with Maggie's husband, and she knew he smoked a pipe. Even the shopkeepers couldn't get tobacco and cigarettes, and they actually kept them for the regular customers and locals." Hugh MacKinnon.

"Wills Woodbine cigarettes were smaller than standard, and sold in an open-ended paper packet at five for two old pence. This packaging allowed a cigarette to be withdrawn with one hand without getting it dirty, hence they were very popular with the 'black squad' in the shipyards, who stored them in their caps. Youngsters bought them singly in corner shops for an old half penny on the request for a 'Woodbine and a match'". Alasdair Sinclair.



The petrol pumps at Scarinish in the 1920s.

John MacArthur (*Teònaidh Chìobair*), brother of Hugh and Dan, bought a corrugated iron building similar to the Reading Room down at the pier where the car park is today and ran it as a small shop. He was followed by Sam Stevenson, who lived in it from the mid-1920s, and who was well-known for repairing radios and recharging their batteries with an accumulator.

"Sam, who was an ex-soldier and who had lost a leg, came with his wife Jean on holiday to Brock. They liked the island, and stayed here until both were over 90."

“He had a wind charger for radio and car batteries, and he worked the hand operated petrol pump. If a visitor, who was not familiar with such a pump, bought petrol, Sam sometimes forgot about the petrol remaining in the delivery hose. He might remember and recover it after the customer had gone!

“He was a keen fisherman . . . and an excellent swimmer.” Alasdair Sinclair.

Kenneth MacKenzie, the piermaster, ran the petrol pump by the old store at the pier. Petrol was 1/8d. a gallon, or 3/9d. for a 2 gallon can with a brass cap and the Shell motif on the side

Johnny Brown, the proprietor of the Scarinish Hotel in the 1930s, had two petrol pumps in front of the present butcher's shop. These were taken over by the Camerons when they moved into the hotel, but when the family moved up to the *Cnoc*, they were moved to the roadside below the present post office.

The piermaster John MacFadyen (*Iain Sheumais mhic Ailein*), who lived in the Stokers' house, sold fish from a pony and trap in the 1950s.

Roddy Mackay had a shop in the pier buildings, *Buth a' Chidhe*, where he sold frozen and knitted goods from 1985 to 1989.

Scottish Hydro-Electric have a small showroom at the pier.

The West Highlands Crofters Co-operative had a store for agricultural supplies in the Old Hall at the pier. They later moved into a new building managed by Mr. Skinner. He was assisted by Lachie MacLean, Kilmoluaig who succeeded him as manager.

Heanish

Neil MacDonald (*Niall Rob Eachainn*), moved from Biggar to open a small shop in Eite, Heanish in the 1950s. Amongst other things he sold Calor gas and baked bread for a while.

Donald Lamont (*Dòmhnall Bàn*) had a shop in the 1920s in the house next to Neil Johnston, Heanish. A cousin of *Sèac* Munn's mother, Margaret Lamont, he had the habit of opening the door a few inches if you knocked, asking *“What do you want?”*

Baugh

Donald Munn, Baugh, married Margaret Lamont and had six children, Hugh, Donald, Dan Tulloch (who worked for a shipping company in Aden), John (known as *Sèac*), Mary (known as 'Maxwell'), and Ann. Donald started a coal business, bringing puffers into *Port a' Mhuilinn*, below the house, as well as a shop, called, 'The Store'.

Sèac, who was born in 1892, took over the shop, as well as the tenancy of Baugh farm. There he employed Neil MacFarlane, *Niall Boidheagar*, who lived by the shore in *Taigh Sharah*, Vaul, and who had been a crewman on the puffer, *Mary and Effie*. Being a full-time (and highly-respected) farmer meant that the shop was more likely to be open in the evenings.

He also ran a horse-drawn van, which would make the trip to Caolas every Saturday with goods from his shop. Returning later in the evening through Scarinish, the boys of the township would lie in ambush and try to clamber onto the back of the cart unseen in the hope of some free sweets. Old *Sèac* was too fly for them, and when he felt any movement behind him, he would send the tip of his whip curling around their ears. The shop closed around 1940.



Jack Munn's shop in Baugh.

Another shop attached to the guest house in Baugh was opened in the 1950s by Angus MacRae.

"MacRae had a shop and he sold TV sets. MacRae was one of these guys . . . if you were passing there and you had a heart attack, MacRae would perform a transplant. That's a compliment! He would do anything you wanted . . . he put in Iain Mòr's fireplace, he would mend your TV set, he had a shop, he had a van, he was something else. And he was a charming man with the ladies, he always wore a kilt . . . he was great with the women."
Angus Munn.

Arthur Straker, Mannal, sometimes drove his van. Angus MacRae moved to Inveraray around 1963 to become a handyman for the Rt. Hon. Mrs. Weir of Dunderawe.

Jean and Helen Oldfield run a pottery in the old Fighter Block.

Crossapol

Sandy MacKinnon (*Sandaidh Ghobhainn*) built the 'Sruthan Stores' including a café around 1968. It was then taken over by Iain Wilson, brother of the present Energy Minister Brian Wilson. He introduced self service around 1978.

Ranald Noel Paton then bought the business, and he was followed by Archibald Brown and Son, Tobermory, who already owned the main Balemartine shop. Iain and Fiona MacLeod, who now run it as *Buth MhicLeòid*, then took over the business.

James Skinner came here around 1980 from Glasgow. His great grandmother was from Aberdeen and, having been to Tìree during the herring boom, had said how lovely the island was. The family run Skinners Shopping Centre in a RAF building at the Camp.

Graham MacFarlane bought the Crossapol garage from Donald Meldrum around 1979, and his wife Valerie (known as *an Tè Dhubh*) set up small shop next door called the 'Gearbox', selling hardware and sweets. This business was bought by Vera Goldie in 1984, who ran it for 3-4 years.

Gavin Carter came to Crossapol in 1971 and within a year had opened a bakery. Born in Westray in the Orkneys, he joined the RAF and then worked as a baker in Kirkwall for 14 years. On holiday here in 1961 he met Alf Bruton who had the Lodge Hotel at the time and who suggested setting up a bakery on the island. He delivered his baking with a van. The bakery closed in 1993.



Fiona and Iain MacLeod in 1992.

Dolina MacCallum from Skye, the wife of *Eardsaidh Lachainn* and the mother of Mary Davies and Peggy Cameron, opened 'The Café' where Mary lives today in the 1950s. There she sold sweets, lemonade, and ice creams, particularly to passengers on the plane.

George Paterson began to sell coal in Crossapol in the 1930s, and he was followed by his son *Iain Dhèorsa*..

Kenovay

Charles Lamont (*Tearlach Iseabail*) from Ruaig was a coal merchant, bringing coal into the beach at Balephetrish by puffer, and storing it in the Coalree on the north side of his house. The first coal was brought in there in 1900, at 12 shillings a ton.

Archie MacLean (*Eardsaidh Mhuilinn*), the father of Donald ('the Butcher'), Nancy MacKinnon and Jessie MacKinnon, Kilkenneth, returned after the First World War from New Zealand and was given a croft in Kenovay for returning servicemen. He butchered in his shed.

Fiona Maxwell opened 'Fiona's Craft Centre' in 1993.

Balephetrish

Walter MacQuarrie and his wife Effie moved from their shop in Balemartine to Balephetrish in the 1930s and set up a small shop in a back bedroom of their house.

One evening a sow from Salum had walked to Whitehouse, where there was a boar. On its way home Hugh MacLean, *an Ròn*, and Iain MacKinnon, *am Maigheach* guided it into MacQuarrie's shop as a joke!

They later moved into the house next to *Taigh 'Nanag'* in Kenovay opposite the Coalree. Walter died around 1943.

Balemartine

Ciorstaidh MacKinnon and her half brother, Lachie MacDonald (*Lachainn Dhòmhnaill*) opened a shop (*Buth Chiorstaidh Ailein*) in Balemartine that became the second largest shop on the island.

They had a new house and shop (which have now become the Baptist manse) built by Hugh MacKinnon, Crossapol (*Eoghan Dhòmhnaill*), a contractor, for £600. When asked why it was being built so high, Lachie replied "*Tha mi sgith de thòit Ghorraig*" ("I am tired of the smoke of Gorraig", an old name for that part of Balemartine which had a bad reputation).

Lachie took over the coal business from Hugh MacLean, Balemartine. He brought in coal on puffers including the *Starlight* and the *Moonlight* onto Soroby beach, where there is still a mooring ring to mark the spot. Extra coal was put in the coalree (*Stòr Guail Lachainn Dhòmhnaill*) down by the beach.

Chrissie Brown, who had been brought up by *Ciorstaidh Ailein*, took over the running of the shop with her husband Duncan MacArthur (*Donnchadh Alasdair 'ic Sheumais, an Clachair Mòr*, known as *Dòn*). *Dòn* was tragically drowned on his way to a Regatta in 1954, and Alan Brown, whose father Archibald had been an established merchant in Tobermory, bought the shop.



The stop in Balemartine.

In 1954 Harry Rutter from Cornwall, whose wife Flora came from Tobermory, came to Balemartine as manager.

Shortly after this the old shop was extended with a store upstairs connected by a hoist. A licence to sell alcohol was obtained, the first after the Scarinish Hotel had regained its licence in 1954. Indeed, Mr. MacDougall, the head-teacher at the time, would not let his wife shop there because of this.

Flour, oatmeal, and hens' grain came in large sacks, and a daily task was to weigh this out into brown paper bags.

"It was a battle in the early days to keep the mice from eating much of the contents of the sacks." Jessie Gray (née Rutter).

Cheeses came in huge round *mullachagan*, which were cut up with wire, and large joints of bacon hung on hooks to be sliced by hand. Bread came in large hampers. In summer, woe betide you if you hadn't ordered your loaf, for there could be a real 'bunfight' over what was left.

"All bread, baked in Glasgow, came to Tiree by night train to Oban, thence by mail boat three days a week. It was packed, still hot, in hampers lined with paper. It went mouldy within twelve hours of arrival. No wonder everyone baked scones every day!" Alasdair Sinclair.

"In summer, when more people were on the island, bread became an item to be fought for. It was a skill to know how much to order, but if there was a shortage, and the regular customers didn't get their usual, then all hell broke loose, and Harry and Babs got quite an earful."

"Papers also caused problems...if there was a shortage of Peoples' Friends, that caused more aggro and heartache. I remember a woman sitting on the back shop stair crying, because she didn't know how to go home to her husband without the usual papers, which had not arrived on the boat." Jessie Gray.

At New Year many people ordered a bottle of whisky, which was wrapped in corrugated and then brown paper, and tied beautifully with string and label. Returning summer visitors, such as the Gibsons and Stokers, would telephone ahead to order a box of groceries. This was then ready at the shop when they came off the boat.



Petrol barrels at Balemartine.

The shop also started to sell petrol, at first at a site nearer the main road, and then opposite the shop right next to the school playground. Fuel had to be pumped by hand from 44 gallon drums into a large underground tank only feet away from the school playground.

“People came when they needed petrol, whether the shop was open or not, and this infuriated Harry, but he still rose from his meal, or from whatever he was doing to oblige the customer . . . there were petrol crises due to various circumstances, and petrol was rationed a number of times, but Harry Rutter tried to be as fair as possible, so that everyone got some, but those like the doctor got more. This of course didn’t please some people!” Jessie Gray.

In front of the house were two garages.

“The big garage was where the van was kept, as well as car oil, tyres, grease, rope, bamboo fishing rods, and television aerials. In the early day . . . these aerials had to be on poles about forty feet high . . . Not only did Browns sell you the television and aerial, but Harry would erect the aerial, which was no easy task, and then attempt to tune the set.” Jessie Gray.

Many characters used the shop. One daily visitor to the shop was Flora Campbell, *Flòraidh Bhaird*, who lived up the side road, or *ùtraid* in Balemartine. She worked for Mr. MacLennan, the factor in Heylipol and walked home every day past the shop. Her daily routine never varied. She bought half a stone of hens’ grain, which she paid for, then half a pound of butter which she then paid for too, and so on. Finished, she would go outside and wait for a passing car to give her a lift up the hill.

The shop had one van, driven by Alasdair MacArthur, Sandaig, a retired postman, and later by Alasdair MacKinnon (*Alasdair Dubh*), Balephuil Colin Brown, Robert Gray, Tommy Rodgers and Neil MacArthur amongst others. It went out three times a week, on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday. When the rival Co-op van came to Balemartine, Harry Rutter would not allow his family to shop there.

Nan Tester, Chrissie MacFarlane, Seònaid Brown, Annie Lyons, Robert Gray, Neil MacArthur, Cathie Mackechnie, Sheila MacKinnon Anne Cameron and Mary Jane MacCallum were among those who worked in the shop at one time. Once a year, in October, Alan and Margaret Brown came over from Tobermory to allow the Rutters to go on their two week annual holiday. The Rutters left the island in 1973, to be followed as managers by Iain and Fiona MacLeod in 1976.

“Sometimes bread arrived in these woven baskets . . .and we discovered that if you undid this stuff that they were made of and you got nice straight bits, they were like cigarettes, right? And we couldn’t afford cigarettes.

“So we had our den in Balinoe behind my house . . . and we used to light them from the fire . . . and we thought we were the cat’s whiskers, sitting back and smoking away, and the taste of your tongue was on fire!” Alasdair Straker.

Another shop in Balemartine was started by Walter MacQuarrie (*Bodach MhicGuair*), who came from Newcastle. He was not related to the earlier MacQuarries of Hynish, who came from Mull. There was a loft above the shop with an outside pulley which can still be seen. Helen Kennedy (*Eilidh bheag*) worked for him there in 1916.

“You’ll remember Teònaidh Ban and Niall Mòr. Their father was also John. The MacQuarries had the Coalree at Balinoe and . . .this winter he [John] ran out of coal and he went away down with a horse and cart . . . MacQuarrie said ‘No! You’ll get nothing until you pay the bill.’

“Oh, Dhia! And MacDonald said to him, ‘You know yourself, you always get paid after the cattle get sold in April, there’ll be money.’

'No, you're getting nothing until you've paid the coalman.'

"There's nothing like a man with half a dozen little children in a freezing cold house in the middle of winter . . . and he lifted him up, and he sat him on top of the coal, and he said, 'If you've any sense at all, sit there until I fill this cart.' Well you know how strong Niall Mòr and Teònaidh were. Well, their father was just as strong!" Hector MacPhail.

MacQuarrie moved to Balephetrish after 1931, and the business was taken over by Neil MacArthur (*Niall Ruadh* or *Gille Ruadh an t-Sleibh*) from Balephuill, who was also a beautiful singer.

Niall Ruadh had a van. He is also remembered for never writing down his totals, preferring to add up the bills in his head. *"One and two, one and two, one and three, one and three . . ."*

Hector Campbell came back from Australia to open a shop on *an Cnoc Mòr* in Balemartine, *Buth Eachainn Sheumais*. This was well-known as a ceilidh shop, where people met at night. He was well-known locally for having a pet cockatoo in a cage in his house. His niece Nonnie MacFadyen worked there for many years. The shop was closed on Sundays, and Thursday afternoons. It finally closed its doors in the early 1960s.



Cnoc Mòr, Balemartine.

There was also another small shop by the shore, *Buth Chiorstaidh Phrèadaidh*. In 1881 Margaret MacFarlane and Maggy Cameron are recorded as 'Grocers' in the Census in Balemartine and a Christine MacFarlane, aged 26, is recorded as 'Keeping house and shop'.

Archie MacFadyen, Balemartine, had a cart from which he sold groceries at the turn of the last century. A song about him shows that pricing wars could be just as fierce in the nineteenth century as they are today:

*Gach marsant' mun-cuairt ann an diùmb is an gruaim riut
Bhon chaill iad an sluagh bha mun-cuairt orra fhèin.
'S e sgillin a-nuas thug gu buileach a' bhuaidh dhuit
Tha beannachd gach truaghan mun-cuairt ort gach ceum.*

*Every merchant around feels resentful and troubled by you
Since they lost their regular customers
It was the penny by which you reduced (your prices) which clinched your success,
You are surrounded by the blessings of the poor people in every step you take.
[translation by Flora MacPhail]*

John MacKinnon, Balemartine (*Iain beag Iain an Tuathanaich*) sold eggs.

“They had so many hens, a huge amount of hens, you could go and buy eggs by the dozen... Italian prisoners of war, they wouldn’t come any further than the burn, and I would come along here and buy eggs for them.” Alasdair Straker.

His uncle, *Calum Iain an Tuathanaich*, who lived at Springfield, had a large vegetable garden at the back of the farmhouse.

“He had a huge big plot up there, every vegetable you can think of, and you just came over and knocked on the door and he accompanied you up and dug them up . . . I don’t think there was any weighing, you just got so much, but the carrots were the talk of the island, they were absolutely huge.” Alasdair Straker.

The Oban Times of April 2nd 1991 announced:

“The Agricultural Co-operation Society are erecting new premises in Balemartine for storing the goods that they put on sale to the people. The structure is of wood and is large and commodious.”

This was between the Balephuill turning and the graveyard and was manned by Duncan MacKinnon (*Donnchadh Iain Mhòir*). Eggs were also bought and sent away. It had closed by 1928. The corner as the road turns down to Balephuill is still known as *Turn a’ Chooperative*.

Mannal

Mary Ann MacDonald had a small shop in Mannal, *Buth Mairi Anna Lachainn a’ Ghreusaiche*. She did not have a van. She was probably the last person on Tiree to make her own whitewash, or *aol*, with which she painted the shop’s walls. To do this she burnt limpet shells overnight under a covering of turfs. She was succeeded by her daughter Mary (‘Maiseag’) helped by her uncle Johnny Tàillear.

The 1891 Census records Flora Campbell, aged 74, Retail Shopkeeper (Groceries) in Mannal.

Hynish

Lachlan MacQuarrie came from Ardtun in Mull to be the Ground Officer on the estate, living in Heylipol. By 1871 he had moved to Hynish House as he took over the 900 acre farm in the township.

His son, Murdoch took over a shop run by Alex Henderson between 1881 and 1891. He was assisted there (in the bottom flats of the Barracks nearest the sea) by Lachlan MacKinnon, a ‘shopman’s servant’. He supplied fishermen with oilskins, boots, and lines in return for fish.

“He [MacQuarrie] used to supply the fishermen with hooks and Wellingtons and oilskins. And he used to buy the fish, the dried, salted fish. And he was a hard, hard man, and a lot of years at the end of the fishing season, the fishermen owed him money after things were all squared up. And then MacQuarrie went home to Mull, and he choked to death on a piece of meat, much to the delight of the Tiree fishermen. They were dancing with joy!” Hector MacPhail.

Indeed, it is said that they were only sorry he had not choked on a piece of salt fish.

Balinoe

The MacArthurs' shop in Balinoe, known as *Buth Chaluim 'Bel* (Malcolm son of *Iseabal*) had one of the first horse-drawn vans, replaced before the Second World War by two motor vans. Calum, who ran the shop and croft with his brothers Colin, Archie and Duncan, was a great businessman. Once, on his rounds, he was told that he could never sell whelks or winkles (*faochagan*), regarded at that time as a poor man's food. The next week he took a bag around with him and sold the lot in one day!

"What sort of food did your mother buy from the shop?"

"Tea, always tea, and sugar . . . They were getting their meal home from the markets away. 140 lb of flour, a bag of oatmeal and a bag of Indian meal, and the womans [sic] were making scones.

"Malcolm MacArthur down in Balinoe, was going around with the van and he would be getting hampers of bread too, more in the summer time when the visitors would come along, and he would have them in the van, and they were getting blue-moulded before he would get them sold. And in these days a loaf was only threepence . . . and when we were young my mother would be meeting him down by the crossroads (he would be going over Moss and Balevullin and these ways) if he had any blue loaves. She was getting them for three half pennies, yes! And he was telling her what to do with them, yes! Cut the blue thing off and give it to the hens, and you could do a pudding for the boys, yes! But you won't get that nowadays at all." Hector Kennedy talking to Eric Cregeen, 1974.

"I remember going to the shop in Balinoe as a girl [about 1910] and we loved going there because we always got this wee poke of sweets, as children you know . . . The MacArthurs had it then." Mabel Kennedy, Sandaig.

Around the entrance to the shop used to be an alleyway of willow trees almost as high as the house which was known as *Taigh nan Craobh*.

Balephuill

The other large shop in the west end was run by Duncan MacKinnon, known as *Buth Dhonnchadh Alasdair mhic Lachainn* in the *Bail' Ur*. It was started in a cupboard in the house by Marion Gillespie from Islay, who married Alasdair MacKinnon, a cartwright in Balephuill. She was also instrumental in bringing Corsons, the auctioneers, to the island in place of the Speedy brothers who went around buying cattle. Their son Duncan (*Donnchadh Alasdair*) took over the business with his sister Marion MacFadyen, *Baile Mhic 'Eotha*.

"There was a crowd round that place [the Balephuill shop] . . . a crowd . . . every night you would go over to Balephuill there would be a crowd at the shop, yes! And you would get anything at the shop at 12 o'clock! Yes . . . no rules and regulations that's going on today . . . no! You would kill two birds with the one time."

"What kind of thing were they selling?"

"Everything that's going on . . . anything you'd get there – cart drawers . . . curry combs, sugar, tea, paraffin, stack rope, spades of all kinds. Oh it was a great shop once upon a time." Hector Kennedy and Eric Cregeen, 1974.

Duncan was succeeded by his son Alasdair (*Alasdair Dubh*).

Bernie Smith remembers helping *Bean Sheumais na Cròige*, an elderly woman living in West Hynish, home with her shopping each week for 6d.

Seònaid Brown even remembers buying a carpet at the shop, and her husband, Alasdair, bought a suit there. It also sold petrol. The shop closed in 1972.

Niall MacDonald, at *Buth Neill Iain 'ic Dhòmhnaill Mhòir* which was opposite the MacKinnon's shop in the *Bail' Ur*, had a large polished counter and a horse and cart from where he used his whistle to let the township know he had arrived.

There was also an earlier shop run by MacKinnons on the Sliabh, in Balephuill, but the exact location is no longer known.

Heylipol

James Campbell (*Seumas Dhòmhnaill Sheumais*) ran a coal merchant's business. The remains of the coal store can still be seen in front of his house.

Moss

The biggest shop in the north end of Moss at one time was run by *Tearlach Mairead*.

A satirical poem, *Niall MacDhonnchaidh Bhàin*, by John MacLean, the Balemartine bard, commemorates one of his qualities:

*Nuair rainig Tearlach Mairead-
Is ainmeil e 's gach aite'-
Le eallach bhotul de'n deoch riomhaich
'Chuir 's a' phriosan cach.*

*When Charles, the son of Margaret arrived
(He was well-known everywhere)
With his load of fancy drink,
Which caused others to serve a prison sentence.
(translation by Flora MacPhail).*

He was also well known for the big boots that he sold – *brogan Thearlaich Mairead* - and for his supplies of ammunition and powder for guns.

Seònaid Mhoireasdan, the grandmother of Neil and Alasdair MacArthur, had a shop in Moss. It closed around 1946.

Lachainn Mhic Artair ran a shop from his thatched house opposite Catriona Hunter's home today. He was succeeded by his niece Mary-Bell. It was going in the 1920s.

Middleton

A new factory was built in Middleton to extract iodine from seaweed in 1863. Attached to this was a shop, and kelp gatherers were paid £4 a ton in shop tokens, sometimes known as tommy or truck, or £2 a ton in cash.

This common practice had begun early in the nineteenth century when large groups of ‘navvies’ were hired to build the canals and railways of Victorian England. The tokens paid to navvies could only be redeemed in company shops where goods were much more expensive. This system was made illegal by the 1830 Truck Act, but there were no inspectors, and the law was widely ignored.

In 1886, those who worked at the Middleton factory rebelled against their method of payment. One ringleader who is still remembered was *Iain an Tuairneir* who lived in Sandaig.

The shop, known as *Buth Shleven* after the name of the manager, closed when the factory closed in 1901. It was then taken over by *Magaidh Ailein* MacFadyen from Scarinish (whose brother ran the Scarinish shop), with her sister Hannah and brother *Tearlach*. Their shop closed in 1927.

Archie and Alexina MacArthur ran a small shop on the site in the 1960s. They had a van.

One of the crofts in Middleton belonged to *Iain a' Mharsanta* (Iain the merchant). Archibald MacPhail, who died in 1830, composed a lament to Iain MacDonald, ‘*Marsanta ann an Tiriodh*’. (*Na Baird Thirisdeach* p. 11).

Sandaig

John MacKinnon, *an Taibhsear* (the Seer), had a shop in Sandaig.

Greenhill



Buth Cheit an 'Dan', Greenhill.

Buth Cheit an 'Dan' was a small shop run in her back room, or *clòsaid*, by Kate Sinclair at *a' Chachaileith Dhubh*, Greenhill around 1930.

Kilkenneth

Jessie MacKinnon, who had learnt the trade from her father Archie MacLean in Kenovay, ran a butcher's business from her house until 1992.

Kilmoluaig

There was a small shop in 'Four Winds' run by Hector MacDougall (*Buth Eachainn Dhòmhnaill*). His daughter *Oighrig Eachainn bhig* ran a dressmaker's business there in the 1950s.

Angus MacKinnon had a shop (*Buth Aonghais Eachainn*) in the house where *Iain Aonghais* lives today.

Balevullin

Donald MacDonald had a shop (*Buth Dhòmhnaill Alasdair 'ic Dhonnchaidh*) in Balevullin. He shared the house with his brother Duncan, a retired sea captain on the mail steamer running between Sydney and San Francisco. He was meticulous in his serving of a customer, seemingly knowing exactly what length of tobacco would come to one ounce.

"Donald would have the big joints of ham, and he would actually cut your bacon with a knife . . . and cut the cheese with a wire. I remember him doing that very clearly . . . very precisely, and how he could measure a half pound or a pound of cheese and get it to come out exactly when he put it on the balance-type scales with the old brass weights . . . a very astute man he was." Iain MacDonald.



Donald MacDonald's shop in Balevullin.

Buth Mor Bhrùin was running in the 1930s in a small building opposite Red Roofs. She was married to Iain Cameron (*Iain Mhurchaidh*) who had worked as a policeman in Glasgow where he had been commended for stopping a runaway horse. Children often visited the shop hoping for a handful, or *cnuachdan*, of sweets, and hoped that Iain with his large hands would be the one working behind the counter. It closed in 1957.

There was another small shop in the house where Jean MacCallum lives today, *Buth Bheil / Ceit Dhòmhnaill Neill*. Bell was a MacLean from the Green who married Donald Kennedy. The shop was in the *closaid*, or back room. It closed around 1939.

Murdoch Cameron (*Murchadh Mòr*) was butchering in Balevullin from the 1930s to the late 60s.

Cornaigmore

One of the largest shops on the island was Hugh MacPhail's (*Buth Eoghain 'Ic Phàil*) which opened around 1894. There was always a warm welcome for customers. One of his daughters had fond memories of the celebratory ceilidhs and cups of tea afforded to shoppers on the day they first received their old age pensions. There was a small shed for paraffin at the back of the building (*taigh a' pharaffin*) and one for flour at the front (*taigh na mine*).

The Post Office was attached. When Archie MacKinnon started work in 1953 as the school janitor, the school had no telephone and he had to go across to the shop to send telegrams.



Hugh MacPhail's shop in Cornaigmore.

The bread with the loaves stuck together came in large hampers from Beattie's or Bilsland's Bakeries.

"A loaf was like a piece of cake in those days."

"And you would get this Swiss Roll, which was very good in these days."

"I don't know if they still make it. Mouthwatering to say the least!" Alasdair Straker talking to Margaret Campbell.

Hugh's son Willie took over the shop, followed by his sister May and her husband Jimmy Robertson who ran a small van for a while until it closed in the early 1970s.

Flora MacLean, *Floraidh Ruadh*, sister of the miller *Eardsaidh Ruadh*, sold sweets and apples from a small room off her scullery to schoolchildren during their breaks. This closed in 1935.

The Rev. Hector Cameron taught the following verse to the children of Cornaigmore around 1935:

*In yonder wee shoppie of sweet Floraidh Ruadh
Where we spent all our pennies on brioscaid mhor cruaidh
We'll get the big bargain of sweeties galore,
And life is still happy on bonny Traigh Mhor.*

The Cornaig Agricultural Co-op Society was running in the 1920s with Charles MacLean as its secretary.

Epilogue

“So when you go into the Co-op or MacLeod’s shop now, you must think back to, would you say, the good old days?”

“In some respects they certainly were. There’s no doubt at all that they were very happy days, for me any way, I must say. Everything now is for convenience.” Margaret Campbell talking to Alasdair Straker.

Licensed premises

The First Statistical Account of 1791 speaks of *“Four public houses at the ferries and harbours in both isles [Tiree and Coll].”*

The Second Statistical Account, written in 1845, says:

“There are two licensed inns in Tiree, but it is to be observed that several low illicit tippling houses . . . have been springing up of late in this island, especially on farms contiguous to the lighthouse work [in Hynish], as if intended chiefly for the persons there employed who have generally some money at command, and might be expected to be profitable customers.”

Soon after this, around 1848, the Duke removed the licence from Tiree, after a woman died on her way home after drinking at the inn at *Crois*, Kilmoluaig. But while alcohol could not then be sold legally, there were always a number of houses, or *shebeens*, where whisky could be bought if you were known to be trustworthy.

The most famous of these was run by *Màiri Ann an Rìgh* in Moss. She was undisturbed by the Argyll Constabulary, partly because she was very careful to whom she gave a bottle.

One man, then a boy of around 16, remembers being sent for a bottle by a group of older men at the end of a hard day’s work in 1936. One of these, Sandy, told him exactly how he was to knock four times slowly on the door. The door opened slowly. *“Hello, Sandy!”* Mairi Ann said, before she saw the young man in the fading light!

A well-known Tiree proverb is used when someone is late - *“Stad e mu Ghod!”* (he has stopped in Gott). This was because there was a *shebeen* there, although its exact site is no longer known.

There was also a *shebeen* in Kirkapol, on the site of *Tobhta Magaidh Bhrùn*. Her grandmother, *Mairi nighean Eoghain*, ran the *shebeen*, and once famously sold a bottle of urine to a gauger (customs officer) when he tried to trick her into selling him some whisky!

Eardsaidh Bànn ran a *shebeen* in Shore Street Balemartine.

There was *shebeen* in Kenovay run by a woman whose nickname was ‘Cash Lad’. At one end of the house there lived a pig. One night she was reluctant to get up and serve a customer who was banging on the door. *“Eirigh, a’ Chash Lad, neo cuiridh mi sgian anns a’ mhuc!* (Up you get, or I’ll put a knife in the pig!)” Needless to say, he got his way.

Donald MacDonald (*Dòmhnall Neill Thearlaich*) had a croft in Crossapol where he would serve beer through a hatch in his garage. This was known locally as ‘Uddingstons’. He lost his croft around 1950 because of this.

Lachie Cameron (*Lachainn Iain Bhàin*) would sell whisky from his house on the *Sràid Ruadh* in Balevullin in the 1920s and 30s. He was once taken to court in Tobermory, but was only fined. He also sold flour from a *taigh na mine* opposite the house where the Neills lived.

There was also a *shebeen* around 1900 in Balephuill at *Taigh Iseabail a' chnuic* (Bella Kennedy), also known as *Taigh Criubha Ghille Chrìosd* after her family who had moved there from *An Fhaolainn*, West Hynish.

The Camerons moved from *Miodar* in Caolas to Scarinish in 1950 to take over Scarinish farm and the Temperance hotel. The lease referred to the "*farmhouse used as an inn*". They applied successfully for a drinks licence around 1952.

Appendix 1

The Co-op staff (managers in bold):

Mr. Robb; Cathie (*bheag*) MacNeill; Flora MacKinnon (mother of Fiona MacLeod) and Effie MacDonald (now Wheelie), Mannal.

Mr. Taylor (1945); Rebecca and Margaret MacDonald, Blairgarry; Cathie Omand; Johnny *Noanian* MacDonald, Coll Cottage, as 'store boy'.

Archie Simpson from Oban, who stayed in 'Links Cottage'; Archie Robertson, Lochgilphead; deputy, Nancy MacKinnon, Sandaig; Netty MacDonald, Scarinish; Cathie Omand. Alistair MacLean, Salum, drove the van.

Bill MacLean, who was the manager when the building burnt down. His wife ran the telephone exchange, where they also lived.

J.M. Galt; deputy Mr. MacQueenie; Margaret MacInnes, Ruaig; Kate MacCallum, Scarinish; Rosie MacIntyre, Gott; Cathie Omand; Willie MacLean, Scarinish, as 'store boy'. Mr. Galt lived in 'The Willows' which had been bought by the Co-op.

Mr. MacKinnon, who lived in 'The Willows'; Flora (*Neenie*) MacNeill; Jane MacKinnon, Baugh; Marion MacLean, Scarinish. The van driver was Robert MacMaster (*Rob Mòr*).

Donald Brown, Balephuill; Catriona Brown; Ann Kennedy; May MacPhail; Margery Kennedy; Nancy Kennedy; Cathie Omand.

Neill MacLean, Kenovay; Vicky MacLean; Allina Langley; Morag Slowther; Cathie Omand; John Omand.

Ann Kennedy; Margaret Kennedy; Cathie Omand.

Cathie Omand; Donald Farquhar; Tommy Monaghan; Ishbel MacArthur; Morag Slowther; Peggy Lamont, Crois; Jill Robertson; Lorna MacDonald.

Tom Marshall; Lynn Marshall; Morag Slowther; Jill Robertson; Cathie Omand.

Isabel MacKay; Jill Robertson; Andy Hayes; Cathie Omand.

Andy Hayes