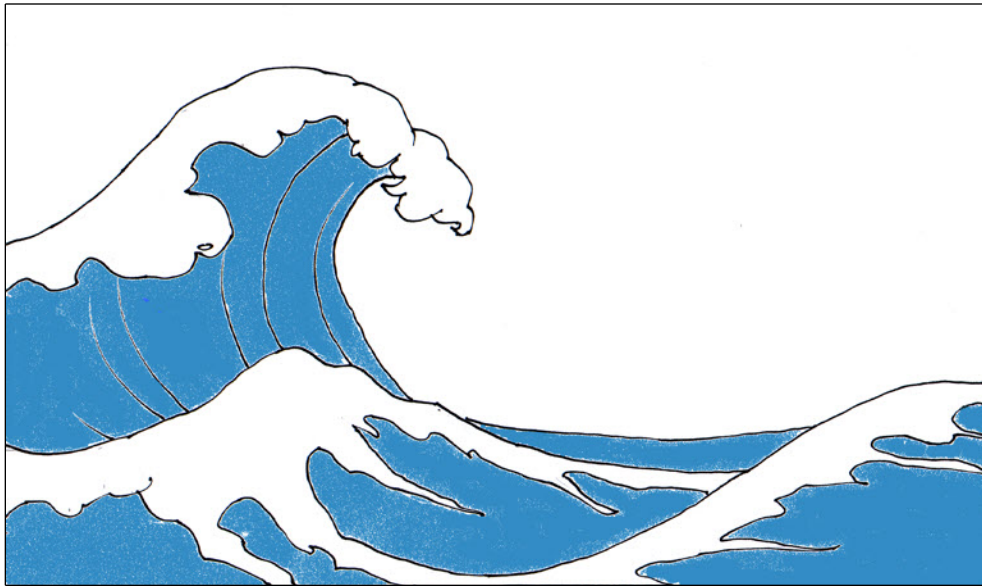


Water from the Seventh Wave



A history of Tiree's healers

Tiree and Coll Gaelic Partnership, Summer 2001

Doctors

The first record of a doctor whose practice included Tiree was in 1572. **Andrew Beaton** from Pennycross, Mull, was described as “*the principal medical officer for Mull, Morvern, Tiree, Islay, Jura, Luing, Ardgour and Lochaber.*” This is obviously an enormous area to cover, but we have to remember that only the wealthiest could afford his fees. The Beatons were a famous west coast family who used medieval Latin and Arabic medical texts translated into Gaelic and who were trained in both surgery and herbal treatments.

Over a century later Andrew’s descendant, **John Beaton**, also from Pennycross, was noted in 1699 to “*have a chest full of Gaelic books. Most of them are written on parchment, and they are on the Isle of Tiree now.*” The medieval Gaelic medical tradition was, however, dying out, and John was the last member of his family to practice in the old style.

In 1695, Martin Martin had visited Tiree and described the island as damp and “*unwholesome and the natives subject to ague [fevers, probably malaria]. The inhabitants living in the south east parts are for the most part bald.*”

In contrast, Thomas Walker paid a visit to the island in 1764 and found the islanders “*in general extremely healthy... There was a gentlewoman who was 103 years old and two men of 98.*” Smallpox, however, had swept through the island in 1756 when 105 children died and, in 1763, 40 children had died of whooping cough.

In 1795 the minister of Tiree wrote: “*The situation of this parish is dismal without a surgeon residing in it....Too often has the present incumbent seen child-bed women [suffer] sad sacrifices without relief.*” He reported that the islanders had several times collected money for a surgeon, but none of those who had come had stayed very long ... and he suggested that a farm “*together with what a surgeon might add to it by his practice, might be an object worth attention to some gentleman of that profession.*”

In 1836, Alan Stevenson assembled a workforce in Hynish to build Skerryvore lighthouse. To look after the 140 workers he employed a surgeon, **David L. Campbell**. Fortunately, despite the hazards of the sea, explosives and quarrying, there were no fatal accidents, although the foreman of the carpenters, George Middlemass, died of a heart attack during the project and another worker died of consumption (tuberculosis). One of the masons did have to be evacuated from Skerryvore in severe pain.

In 1844, Tom Stevenson, Alan’s brother, wrote that he had been out riding with Dr. Campbell one evening on Tiree. “*I observed that he became gradually more and more incoherent in his conversation till at last he dropped off his horse. At first I thought it must have proceeded from the effects of vinum generosum,[too much alcohol] but as he was quite well when we came out, I saw that it was not that. It arose from him having eaten about an ounce of morphia lozenges during our ride. This is a very curious case. He was delirious during all that night and was unwell for several days after.*”

In 1840, the lack of a regular doctor for the island itself was still being keenly felt. The minister of the time again reported, *“It is somewhat singular that this parish should have been almost always destitute of a medical practitioner....Even when such aid is called from other countries, at an expense which few can think of incurring, the state of the weather may prevent its arriving in time to be of service. Several young men have from time to time, tried the experiment of practising here, in the expectation of a certain salary; but have found the remuneration so uncertain and ill-paid, that in a short time they have thrown up the situation in disgust. And yet, between the two islands [Tiree and Coll], it might be supposed that a respectable salary could be made up for such a person without much difficulty.”*

This was in sharp contrast to North Uist, where the famous Dr. Alexander MacLeod (*an Dotair bàn*) had succeeded his father as doctor in Kilyshedar as early as 1809.

Those who were well enough and could afford it travelled to Tobermory where there had been a doctor since 1825. However, by 1850 the next minister had better news in a reply to a survey by the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh.

“Two surgeons, John Gilchrist, 45, who was living in Cornaigbeg [and after whom a croft there, Croit an Dotair Mhòir was probably named] and Donald MacLean had been settled on the island for five years and the island was well covered. Only in cases of midwifery, partly no doubt from their prurery, were local women called in preference to the doctors.”

A tragic example of this did occur in 1857 when Lachlan Lamont, from Vaul, sent for help for his wife Margaret who was having a difficult labour. Unable to contact the *bean-glùine* or traditional midwife in Balevullin or Caolas, he sent for an elderly man from Coll who was said to be *“a good hand at the delivering of women”*. Unfortunately, Lachlan’s wife died and the Coll man was tried for culpable homicide.

Although there were now two doctors on the island, the same minister reported that, *“most of the poorer classes ... often suffer much for want of medical aid from inability to call one when required.”*

A step forward in allocating doctors to remote areas had been the change in the Poor Laws of 1845. This took assistance to the poor out of the hands of the Church and put it into those of a lay Parochial Board. Islanders judged to be unable to work were put onto a Poor Roll and given 4 or 6 shillings a year.

An example of the sort of poverty to be found on Tiree was recorded in the Poor Law Inquiry records of June 1843 after a visit to the island.

“Donald Kennedy, not on the Roll, has a daughter, an idiot. She has a wretched bed, with a single blanket. He can’t afford fuel, except to cook his food; and when the potatoes are boiled, the fire is removed and put into a hole in the floor and covered with turf, to exclude the air and prevent it from burning ... Furniture, a little crocker.”

Those on the Poor Roll were however entitled to free medical care, paid for by the Board. This became an important part of the income of country doctors.

In 1860 **Dr. Alexander Buchanan**, a 25 year old surgeon, newly qualified from Edinburgh, was appointed. He came from Trean, a farm two miles outside Callander in Perthshire, and was encouraged by the Duke of Argyll who seems to have promised him the income from Baugh Farm as a living. This had been one of the recommendations of the 1852 report from the Royal College of Physicians in Edinburgh.



Dr. Alexander Buchanan, 1835-1911.

At first, Dr. Buchanan lodged with John and Catherine Lamont at *Lag nan Cruachan*, Cornaigmore and his arrival was fiercely opposed by the sitting tenant at Baugh, Lachlan MacQuarrie. The latter complained to the Duke that he had received an “*illegal summons to quit Baugh to make room for the doctor. I am sure Your Grace is not aware that [he] is given to drink.....which disqualifies him as a doctor for an isolated place like this.*” MacQuarrie’s appeal was, however, rejected and Dr. Buchanan settled down in Baugh Cottage on the site of the present kitchen of Baugh House. His practice originally included Coll, and this situation continued until 1881 when Coll appointed a doctor of its own.

He married Colina Campbell, daughter of Colin Campbell¹, the tenant of Balephetrish farm on 22nd November 1866 at Muchairn in Argyll and the couple had six children:

- Janette (b.1870) who married Captain George Ritchie. They latterly kept a gift shop in Iona and had no children.
- Mary (b.1872) who was unmarried and lived on Coll.
- Colin (*Cailean an dotair*) Campbell (b.1874 twin). He worked his mother’s family’s farm at Caolas, Coll and Gunna into the 1950s. He was unmarried.

¹ Colin Campbell had made his fortune in Australia and returned to buy the family farm on Coll which his father had lost due to bankruptcy.

- James Alexander. (b.1874 twin). He emigrated to Brazil, then Patagonia, where he staked out a 20,000 hectare ranch. He died “*Don Santiago Alejandro Buchanan*” in 1955 with no family.
- Robina (b.1878) who married Dr. Knox who did locums on Tiree for his father-in-law.
- John G. (*Iain an dotair* or *an Dotair ruadh*). (b.1881). He qualified as a doctor after 10 years at medical school, although he lived on Coll and rarely practised medicine, preferring boxing. He never married.

Dr. Buchanan’s household in 1871 included a woolspinner and a governess, four domestic servants and two ploughmen as well as his family.

In 1873 he sent a letter of resignation to the Parochial Board meeting in the Store House (*Taigh a’Bhochdainn*) in Baugh. A deputation, including John Geekie the factor and the Reverend John Gregorson Campbell, went to see him but the doctor stuck to his decision and the vacancy was advertised in the national papers. The next month an Alexander MacGregor from Iona was appointed in his place but Dr. Buchanan backed down and continued in his post. We do not know what had upset him, but the lack of a proper house for his growing family or having to travel regularly to Coll, may have had an unsettling effect.



Baugh House.

As well as payment for looking after those on the Poor Roll, and doing smallpox vaccinations (which had been introduced in 1800), Dr. Buchanan had the income for one of the best farms on the island. From a farming background himself, he was no doubt also helped in the running of the 160 acre Baugh Farm by his wife’s family.

He also had a small amount of private practice looking after the factor and the few *Tirisdich* that could afford his fees. In a letter of 1871, Dr. Buchanan presented a bill of £1 1/- for an insurance medical examination on the factor, Mr. Geekie.

Although Dr. Buchanan was wealthy by island standards, an indication of the importance people of the time placed on medical treatment can be seen in the fact that, in 1880, there was no nurse, one doctor and four ministers on Tiree.

Dr. Buchanan's relationship with Lady Victoria Campbell, the sister of the Duke of Argyll, who was disabled by polio, seems to have been frosty. In 1903 she confided in her diary that "*I was working with a wee jug when it splashed over my arm. The wicked old doctor said it was 'providence' as it gave me rest.*" In 1910 she wrote to the minister in Kirkapol, asking, "*Has the hospital been used? Is the eremitus [sic] doctor still in Tìree?*"

Dr. Buchanan, *An Dotair Mòr*, a Gaelic speaker, worked until his death in 1911 at the age of 75. He left an estate valued at £3,750. It was said his patients would feel better at the sound of his oilskins rustling, and on his death a monument was erected on Cnoc Eibrig, Baugh, to a "*Medical officer and loved and valued friend of the islanders*".



The monument to Dr. Buchanan at Baugh.

This monument, however, was damaged during the Second World War by blasting from the nearby quarry, despite the erection of a wooden shield.

Donald MacDonald, Milton, wrote an elegy on Dr. Buchanan's death, part of which goes:

*Bha 'eolas iomlan air gach eucail,
Is leigheas reith d'a laimh;
Gur cliu d' a dhuthaich 's d'a luchd-dreuchd
Na rinn e dh'fheum nar pairt:*

*Is mor am bearn a dhith ar n-uaislean
Esan a bhi uap' gu brath;
Laidh smalan air gach cearn de'n tir
O'n thainig crìoch a la.*

His knowledge of every disease was complete
His gentle healing was instant.
The benefits he gave on our behalf are a credit
To his country and his profession.

Large is the gap left amongst our gentry
That he is gone forever
A shadow has lain over every corner of the land
Since his day has ended.

(Translated by Flora MacPhail)

Around 1909 a second doctor had come to the island. **Dr. Colin MacDonald** (*an Dotair Domhnallach*) whose first wife was related to Helen Kennedy (*Eilidh bheag*), Balevullin, set up a rival practice in Balemartine in the house that later became MacQuarrie's shop. He had three children, Susan, Sheila and Archie, but it is unlikely the island could support two doctors and he left after a few years to go to Bunessan.

Concerned by the declining physiques of army conscripts during the Boer War, the Liberal government of Lloyd George introduced National Health Insurance in 1911. Working men paid 4d a week and in return were entitled to free medical care. General practitioners ("panel doctors") were paid 7 shillings for each patient on their lists. Unfortunately this had little effect in the Highlands, where few crofters were paid a regular wage.

In 1912, Sir John Dewar was asked to report on medical care in the Highlands and Islands. He found doctors and nurses covering enormous areas and being paid much less than their colleagues in town. His proposal of a Highlands and Islands Medical Scheme whereby country doctors were given a basic salary and nurses were paid for their travelling cost was accepted. Unfortunately, the Great War and the following economic slump delayed full funding until the 1930s. However, the scheme did allow Dr. Buchanan's successors to give up Baugh Farm and concentrate on their medical practice.

Following Dr. Buchanan's death, the practice was staffed by a series of locums:

June - October 1911:

Dr David Campbell.

October 1911 - January 1914:

Dr Donald MacDougall who came from
Greenock Infirmary.

January - May 1914:

Dr Grant Millar from Glasgow.

Dr. Millar was followed, in May 1914, by the 24 year old **Dr. 'Dan' or Donald MacKinnon** (*Dòmhnall Eòghainn na Sraide*) who was born in 1890 at *Tor a' Bhaile*, Ruaig, and went to Ruaig School. He qualified in Glasgow in 1913 and before his return to the island he had been working at the Grampian Sanatorium in Kingussie. He rode a motorbike, coming off it once on the road next to the Nisbet's house in Heanish. He was unhurt and continued on his rounds, although the racing engine and spinning wheels of the upended bike caused some consternation to those who came to his aid.

He is said to have performed a life saving 'operation' on the brother of Catherine Iain MacKinnon from Vaul, who survived, despite the fact that the doctor had only whisky to sterilise the instruments. Dr Dan is also said to have performed an operation on *Catriona Dhòmhnaiill Mhòir* from Scarinish. He was also presented with a stick inscribed "Dr MacKinnon" by *Calum mòr*, Kirkapol, no doubt in gratitude for his medical attention.



Dr. Dan MacKinnon.

In March 1917 Dr. MacKinnon enlisted in the Royal Army Medical Corps, and went off to the War. **Dr. Angus MacInnes** from Kincardine-on-Forth, was appointed to act as the interim Medical Officer of Health on Tìrè pending Dr. MacKinnon's return. In September 1917 Dr. MacInnes told the Parish Council that he could not continue unless the Council would provide "*a lad to attend to his horse and drive him on his rounds.*" The Council agreed and secured the services of John Campbell MacInnes, Kirkapol, as man servant at 8/- per week. Dr. MacInnes announced that he would be leaving in July 1918 and a search was made for a successor. The Highlands & Islands Medical Services Board tried to persuade the Parish Council to accept a Kr. De Silva, a graduate of Edinburgh University, who was from Ceylon. The Parish Council replied that "*the people of Tìrè are averse to the appointment of a man of foreign birth as medical officer*".

Eventually Dr. **James Bell**, Aberdeen, was found to take over the position from August 1918 until June 1919, when Dr. MacKinnon returned. He resigned in the following year, however, and left in July 1920 to become the Parochial Medical Officer in Aberfoyle, Perthshire. He remained unmarried, died in Balfron in 1938 and is buried at Kirkapol.

The next permanent doctor on the island was **Dr. Thomas Wyper Stewart** from Hamilton, who arrived on the 19th June, 1920, freshly qualified in Edinburgh.

He is still remembered for performing an appendicectomy operation on Tìrè in 1924. Archie MacFadyen (*Gilleasbuig Ailein Dhonnchaidh*), an 18 year old from Gott, developed appendicitis, and Dr. Stewart had a teak wardrobe turned on its back and scrubbed with boiling water. He performed the operation outside the patient's house, assisted by Malcolm MacLean (*Calum Mòr*), Kirkapol, who had started but not completed his medical training. At the end of the operation, the doctor was not optimistic, but when he returned at 2 a.m. he pronounced the procedure a success. The patient was lucky in being extremely strong, once carrying a new cart home on his back from Tullymet while still at school. He went on to be a puffer skipper.

Dr. Stewart reported in 1927 on a skin infection suffered by local herring fishermen who had handled nets treated with a bark solution. "*Nets used by crofters who fish herring are never disinfected properly and lie about from one year's fishing to the next*", he wrote to the County Medical Officer. When adequate washing facilities were installed, the disease disappeared.

Dr. Stewart had two children, Jack (who is remembered for riding a motorbike to Cornaig School) and Margaret ("Bunty"). He bought a Model T Ford car while he was here and once delivered three babies in one night in Kenovay, Balephetrish and Vaul. He left Tiree on the 20th of September 1927, and went to Balvicar. From there he moved to Accrington, Lancashire where he worked as a medical referee for the Municipal Mutual and Other Assurance Company. It is said that he later drowned somewhere in the Mediterranean.



Dr. Graeme Hunter as Santa Claus.

On the 30th of September 1927, (there seems to have been ten days with no doctor) **Dr. David Graeme Hunter**, who came from Cumbernauld, but who had been working in Cheltenham, arrived to start the beginning of a 33 year spell on the island. He had been in the Navy during the First World War and had then qualified in 1925 at Glasgow University. His entry in the 1930 Medical Directory reads, "*Medical Officer and Public Vaccinator, Tiree Parish; Certif. Fact. Surg: Assistant Medical Officer of Health and Schools, Medical Officer, Tiree*".

On his arrival on Tiree he was met at the ferry by Mr. MacDiarmid, the factor, who took him to Island House for lunch. However, he was given little time to relax, being immediately called to attend to two cases of severe toothache, firstly Hughina MacKinnon in Kirkapol and then to Balemartine. He is said to have had no proper instruments or anaesthesia but was asked to extract the teeth anyway as best he could.

During his time on the island the air ambulance system was set up, the first flight, to Islay, being in 1933. An air ambulance had landed on *Traigh Mhòr*, Gort in 1934 to evacuate the previously mentioned *Calum Mòr*, Kirkapoll, but the first recorded call to Tiree was later in 1934 when Alasdair Kennedy, Moss, was sent to the Royal Infirmary using the Islay service plane, piloted by Flying Officer Almond. The plane was stripped down in Glasgow, fitted with a stretcher, and sent to the island, landing “*in a field near Hynish Bay*”, presumably near the Land.

Dr. Hunter was the Tiree Home Guard’s Medical Officer and was busy during the Second World War with first aid training. One piece of advice he had, during these classes was, “*If you have any alcohol, drink it yourself, don’t give it to the patient*”.

Another story relates how, during the war, he was stopped by the police at 2am on the way home from a night call to Balemartine. Asked for his driving licence by PC Hugh MacPhedran, (who later became a police inspector in Oban), he was unable to produce it and was asked to report to the Police Station within 5 days. At exactly 2am, five days later the doorbell of the Police Station in Cornaig rang and Dr. Hunter presented the required papers.

Indeed, Dr. Hunter (possibly because of this incident) seems to have had no love of the police. Another story tells of how the island policeman of the time, big Davey MacDonald, brought in a clearly drunk man for medical examination at the surgery. The accused was taken through to the house by the doctor and the policeman could hear the sound of plates and cutlery through in the kitchen. Eventually PC MacDonald could contain himself no longer and knocked on the door and asked the doctor if the man was going to be charged. “*Certainly not*”, replied Dr. Hunter. “*He hasn’t eaten for four days. All he needs is a cup of coffee.*”

He married the district nurse on the island, Nurse Findlater from Aberdeen.

Dr. Hunter was noted for his skills delivering children and is also remembered for his pulling of teeth. His wife would stand behind the patient, usually in his own dining room rather than in the small surgery, gripping the sufferer’s head in a vice-like hold, while the doctor performed the extraction for a fee of 2/6d.

He is also remembered for his slightly old-fashioned cures. The bottles he almost always dispensed were all said to be filled with “*uisge an Fhaodhlach*”, water from *An Fhaodhail*, the stream between the Reef and Baugh. Tonsils were painted twice a day with iodine. As late as 1955 he was using mustard poultices for pneumonia. Brown parcel paper was warmed by the fire and smeared with butter. The hot mustard paste was put on with a knife before the whole was placed on the chest for half an hour. Dr. Hunter stayed up through the night with this patient, re-applying the poultice three times before evacuating her on the boat to Oban. However, it has to be remembered that the treatments available to him were severely limited by modern standards. Antibiotics, for example, only became available in the 1950s.

The following transcribed conversation between Robert Beck, the island’s vet at the time, and Margaret Campbell, Kilmoluaig, gives a flavour of the man:

[RB] “*Do you remember Dr. Hunter? Do you remember the waiting room he had? It was half the size of this room, cold, cement, hard seats and a thin wall. It was the consulting room next door and you could hear what they were saying.*”

[MM] *“He would say, ‘What’s your trouble now?’”*

[RB] *“Some people were terrified of him, I don’t know why, because I got on all right with him, but they were frightened. He had a presence, you know, oh yes, very much the old school. He was very old-fashioned, but, of his time, he was very, very good. He was a first class obstetrician. One of my sons was his last baby. None of this nonsense about fathers being there or anything. He just looked at me and said ‘You’ve got work to do. Get out!’”*

Another old patient of his described him as *“not very approachable”*, but his kinder side was shown soon after he arrived when a family in Cornaigbeg was struck down by a succession of infectious diseases in 1933. Dr. Hunter appeared one day with a box of chocolates (a rare commodity in these days) for one of the daughters who was in bed with chickenpox.

At first visiting by bicycle, he bought a motorbike and then a Morris Cowley car, which was later bought by Alasdair MacArthur, Sandaig. Latterly, he kept two cars in case one broke down. These were looked after by Willie Bunting, and Sam, who lived at the pier.

In 1948 the National Health Service was set up. For the first time everyone became entitled to free medical care and family doctors were paid a fee for every patient on their list as well as a series of allowances.

He had an interest in painting and would visit the hut Allison (a Glasgow artist) had built in Sandaig in the summer. The Hunters had no children and they retired in 1960 to Dun Cottage, Gairlochhead near Helensburgh, although they had seriously thought about building a house in Heanish after they stopped work. At the time of the cattle sales, he would come up to Oban to see his former patients.

A popular Tiree doctor in the 1930s, (although he never practised on the island), was Dr. **‘John Edward’** (actually Edward John) **MacKinnon**. The son of the Reverend Neil (*Niall Ruadh*), minister at Kilchoan, and Elizabeth MacKinnon, he was actually brought up by his cousin *Mairi Iain ’ic Chaluim* in *Taigh an Taibhse / Taigh an t-Saighdeir*, in Sandaig. After school in Cornaig, he qualified in medicine at Glasgow University in 1924 and set up his surgery in Paisley Road West, Glasgow, living round the corner at 6 Bellahouston Terrace, although he also worked as a surgeon in Glasgow’s Western Infirmary. He was a popular ‘second opinion’ for Tiree people, and the house in Sandaig was often busy with patients when he returned to the island in the summer.

A Gaelic speaker with an interest in piping and crofting work, he was also known for his wit. *“That car’s got a terrible cough,”* he would say as someone drove past in a spluttering machine. Unfortunately, he did not always look after himself so well, and he died in 1954. The Tiree Association paid for his gravestone in Soroby.

Dr. Robert Blair Bonar qualified in Glasgow in 1943, where his brother, Andrew, became the senior consultant surgeon in the Royal Infirmary. He had previously worked as an orthopaedic senior registrar at Lanark Orthopaedic Hospital. He arrived on Tiree in 1959. His first wife, Jean, worked as a relief district nurse. When she died, he remarried and moved in 1966 to a practice in Harlech, North Wales. Sadly he died from a brain tumour in 1967.



Dr. Bonar, his wife Jean and their nieces in Cornwall in the early 1950s.

Dr. (Frank) Ray Calvert, who qualified in Manchester, took over the practice in January 1967. He recalls being “*appalled by the physical state of the doctor’s house*” when he arrived. He and his family lived in the Nurses’ house at Cornaig until September whilst the doctor’s house was modernised. A new surgery adjoining the house was also completed in March 1969.

In 1968 the Midspan Survey came to Tiree led by Dr Victor Hawthorne from Glasgow University. He was following a hunch of Dr. Bonar’s in 1965 that islanders’ blood pressure was unusually high. Four hundred Tiree men and women over the age of 15 had a cardiovascular check in the Balinoe Church Hall and the findings confirmed Dr. Bonar’s theory (BMJ, 1969; J. Hyg. Camb., 1972.)

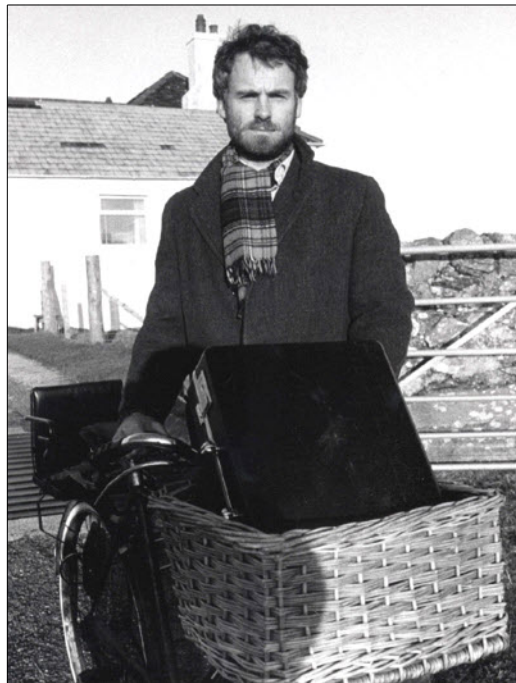
Dr. Calvert also wrote a paper analysing the air ambulance evacuations from the island between 1967 and 1972. He recalls, “*As might be expected, transport and weather played their part in unusual occurrences. Two stand out in my memory. We were due to go on holiday with the locum supposedly arriving by plane the previous day. However, the airport fire service was on strike and so the plane could not land at Tiree. The locum showed great enterprise by flying to Barra and catching the Claymore back to Tiree, arriving at the pier at 5.15am. When I met the boat I was staggered to find a bowler-hatted gentleman leaving the boat complete with rolled umbrella and trench coat looking quite immaculate. He was completely unfazed by the whole episode, despite being given a rapid trip to the house and surgery for the hand over and return to the pier for 6.00 a. m. so that I could board the ferry.*

“*I also remember that when the doctor on Coll became unwell with a possible heart attack, I received a telephone call from higher authority suggesting that I should go over to Coll to see him and do an ECG. This confirmed me in my view that authority on the mainland had not the slightest idea of the transport problems in the islands.*

“One major change in the transport field was the introduction of a drive on ferry to replace the older method of slinging vehicles on to the ferry. My stay on the island coincided with a period of social and medical changes. I can always remember taking delivery of a TV set from the Claymore on Christmas Day 1967 and I think that was the last Christmas Day sailing, as from then on both Christmas Day and New Year’s Day were taken as holidays, whereas previously Christmas was treated as a normal day. The old folk’s home was opened in my time as Janet MacLean was a tower of strength in her capacity as matron.”

Dr. Calvert left the island in July 1972.

Dr. John Duncan Tripney came to Tiree in 1973 from Bingley in Yorkshire. He had qualified in Glasgow in 1950 and then worked in Ayrshire, the early warning radar stations in Northern Canada and then in A & E at the Bradford Royal Infirmary from a post at the missile early warning radar stations in Northern Canada. Unfortunately, he became unwell and died in Menstrie near Stirling soon after.



Dr. John Holliday in 1988.

The island was then looked after by a series of locums (including a **Dr. Caldwell**).

Dr. Iain MacLean (b. 1936) came to Tiree in August 1974. Born and brought up in Dunvegan on Skye where his father was a GP, he trained in Aberdeen before working on the Falkland Islands and in practice in Edinburgh. With his wife Alexandra he has three sons, Angus (living in France), Tearlach (a doctor in New Zealand) and Murdo (living in Australia). He left the island in May 1978 and moved to the practice in Dalmally before retiring to Muir of Ord.

Dr. William Henry Armstrong qualified in Glasgow in 1972. He came to Tiree in 1978 and left in 1981 to become the GP in Gatehouse of Fleet, Castle Douglas. His brother ‘Mac’ was GP in Connel, the Secretary of the British Medical Association in London and is now Scotland’s Chief Medical Officer.

Dr. John Holliday was born in Essex in 1954. After studying Botany at Cambridge University, he went on the medical school in London, qualifying in 1980. After hospital jobs in Fort William, Wolverhampton and London, he trained as a GP and went to work at the remote Aboriginal community of Kintore, Central Australia for the Pintupi Homeland Health Service. He came to Tiree in October 1986.

The Associate Scheme started in 1991. To relieve isolated GPs from their long hours on call, they were allowed to group together in pairs of practices and hire a third doctor to cover between them. In so doing, their annual leave entitlement increased from 4 weeks per year to 17 weeks at a stroke!



Dr Mark Thornber with Doris MacLean.

The first associate on Tiree was **Dr. Peter Maslin**, who worked on the island from 1992 - 95. He had been a GP in Stornoway and moved to the associate post, working between Carloway in Lewis and Tiree, to develop his interest in homeopathy. He died in 1995 and the alternative medical centre in Inverness is named after him.

Dr. Vicki Williams from North Wales was the part-time associate from 1995 -1996. She had trained as a nurse before studying medicine.

Dr. Mark Thornber from Rumbling Bridge, Kinross was the third associate from 1997 - 1998.

Dr. Bob le Masurier, a GP from Suffolk for many years, has been the fourth associate from 1998 to the present day.

Nurses

Until the 1880s, most nursing was done by family and neighbours. Professional nurses had a poor reputation. In 1866 nursing was described as *“the last resort of female adversity - slatternly widows, runaway wives, servants out of place, women bankrupt of fame and fortune”*

However, after the pioneering work of Florence Nightingale, trained nurses became more valued. Lady Victoria Campbell, sister of the Duke of Argyll and disabled as she was by polio, began to lobby for a district nurse for Tiree.



Lady Victoria Campbell.

In 1892 she wrote in her diary, *“Visited doctor’s wife, [Colina Buchanan]. Spoke of nurse. I feel this is a subject we must get settled. It is disgraceful, such a large island should be without a sick-nurse.”*

By 1899 she seems to have succeeded. She wrote in her diary, *“January 1st - dropped nurse after Hyllipol. January 12th, took nurse west.”*

The Reverend William Gillies, minister of Kirkapoll from 1906 to 1909 wrote, *“in order to have the ailing and bedridden poor carefully attended to, Lady Victoria strove to have a Jubilee Nurse [so called to mark Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee in 1897] settled in each district. The nurses were at first regarded as an innovation, ... they were met with some prejudice; but very soon Lady Victoria had the satisfaction of seeing the district nurses fully employed and acknowledged by all sections of the community to be a necessity.”*

The nurse was given an estate house (*Taigh an Nurs*) in Heylpol (where Mr. Gisbey lives today).

The first nurse that is still remembered on the island was a **Nurse Green**. If she was not the nurse mentioned in 1899, she was certainly here in 1909 when she delivered Jessie MacKinnon (*Jessie Lachainn*), Mannal.

The second nurse was a Tiree woman, **Nurse Douglas** or **MacDougall** (*Mòr Chaluim Dhùghallaich*) who came from the house in Cornaigbeg where Mrs. Hamilton lives today.

After her came **Jessie MacNab** (1920-1924) from Islay. All these nurses, like almost everybody else at that time, walked to see their patients.



Jessie MacNab on the right.

Margaret Dow Findlater (1924-1929), *an Nurs Mhòr*, came from Aberdeen. She seems to have been the first nurse to use a bicycle to do her calls, and Angus MacLean, Scarinish, remembers seeing her on her bicycle on his way back from school in Ruaig, dressed in an enormous cape. She married Dr. Hunter and even after stopping work, was sometimes called by him for difficult cases. A large, powerful woman, taller than her husband, she was once seen lifting a 45 gallon drum of paraffin by herself. She is still vividly remembered on the island for the vice-like grip she used to hold patients whose teeth were being extracted.

Catherine McAllister (b. 1902) was the nurse on Tiree from 1930-36. From Bruichladdich on Islay, she was the first nurse to use a motor bike and sidecar on her rounds. Poultices were much used. An islander, who was a young child in the 1930s with pneumonia, remembers the nurse coming in every day, making up oatmeal porridge on the stove and plastering it on his chest under a bandage.

She left Tiree to work as a nurse in Dalmally, but returned to marry *Ailig beag*, Alex MacLean from Balevullin. He was working as the Estate's ground officer and had lived next door to her in the Estate house in Heylipol. Sadly, she was drowned in Glasgow in July 1950 and is buried in Soroby. Her husband died a few months later in the dentist's chair in Oban.



Catherine McAllister.

Susan Ramsay followed her in 1936. Remembered as a small, auburn -haired girl from the mainland, she married Mr Bailey, a teacher at Cornaig School.

She was followed in 1940 by **Rachel** (*Raonaild*) **MacLean** from Uist.



Rachel MacLean.

In 1942 **Catriona MacLean** (*Catrìona Lachainn Eoghainn*, b. 1916) came back to work on her native island, having trained at the Southern General Hospital in Glasgow. Originally from Cornaigbeg, her sister Janet was the first matron of the Eventide Home at Scarinish. Catriona did most of her rounds on a bicycle.

From the time of the first Jubilee nurse on Tiree in 1899 until the start of the NHS in 1948, nursing services were organised by the Argyll Nursing Association. Prominent local women, for example Mrs. W.G. MacDiarmid, the factor's wife, led a committee on the island which raised the necessary funds. A yearly house-to-house 'book' collected 1 to 2 shillings from each household and the teas at one cattle sale were sold in aid of the nurse. Sometimes a ceilidh would be held to raise additional money.

Margaret Laing from Uist was the nurse on the island in 1948 as the NHS was being set up. She was a Queen's Nurse, having taken an additional year's training to work on the district and she objected strongly to being supervised by the County Council.



Anna MacLeod at the Kwa Eebo Mission Hospital in Nigeria in 1956.

Edith Read (b. 1894) came to the island as nurse in 1948. Originally from Manchester, she had been working on the Isle of Wight. She was the last nurse to live in the nurse's house at Heylipol, remaining unmarried. Apart from her nursing skills she is remembered principally for two things - her painfully thin legs, and her sometimes erratic driving. This latter characteristic led to the following story.

In December 1948, soon after she arrived, she attended the birth in West Hynish of Hector Kennedy. After the delivery, she asked Hector's father, Donald Archie, to accompany her in the car back down the pot-holed track. Confused by the lights of the doctor's car which was following, she drove off the bridge at *Dig an lòin bhàin* and her car ended up on its side in the shallow stream below. Unharmmed, she and her passenger climbed out through the uppermost door. As Dr. Hunter, who was known for his sometimes sarcastic sense of humour, drove up, he shouted down, "*Well, were you at sea before?*" The next day a crane was ordered from the airport to lift the Austin 7, but the car had already been pushed upright and onto the road and driven back to *Alasdair dubh's* shop in the Bail' Ur by Murdoch Sinclair who had, in fact, never driven a car before.

In 1950 she accompanied Chrissie MacFarlane, Hynish (who was in labour) on an air ambulance Rapide G-AHXX en route to Renfrew Airport. Lachie MacFarlane was born over Scarba (just north of Jura), the first live mid-air birth in Scotland (but there had been a delivery in the plane on the ground at Stornoway Airport in 1949). During the flight, Nurse Read suffered severe airsickness.

She retired in 1954, but after a short spell back in England, she moved to 7 Reef Terrace, Crossapol where she did a little chiropody work and sold Avon cosmetics. She owned a small dog and was a keen stamp collector. She eventually moved to the Eventide Home and died in 1981. She is buried in Soroby.

Annie MacLeod (*Anna Charrachan*, b. 1922) trained after the war in Glasgow, and at the Edinburgh Faith Mission College. She then worked in the Atinan Mission Hospital in southern Nigeria where she eventually became the nurse in charge of its leprosy wards.

Brought home by family circumstances, she worked as a district nurse on Tìree between 1954-55. Unable to drive, she had to be taken on her rounds by Donald Archie and Duncan Cameron from the Scarinish Hotel. She left to work as a nurse around Lochgilphead and Skye. On one of her return visits to Tìree, she met and married the well-known missionary Kenneth MacRae who was working here at the time. She now lives in Ullapool.

Early in 1955, **Jessie Ann MacCallum**, the sister of Mary Davies and Peggy Cameron, Crossapol, worked here for a few months. She also had no driving licence and was taken on her visits by Catriona MacKinnon, Parkhouse.



Jessie Ann MacCallum.

In 1955 the post was then filled by **Ishbel MacDonald** from Kenovay (*Iseabal Eòghainn Eachainn*). She trained in Glasgow and worked in Suffolk before returning home. Unlike today's rotas, she remembers working seven days a week with four weeks holiday in a year. She married Angus MacLean from Lewis and lived for many years in Canada.

Catriona MacLean returned in 1962 and lived in the new nurse's house in Cornaig, which had been built around 1956. At her sister Janet's house she met Alec Ingram, a retired banker who was filling in on Tìree as the relief Church of Scotland minister between the ministries of Albert Goodheir and Willie John MacLeod. They were married in 1963 and moved to Kilchoan and then Killin before retiring to Oban. She died in 1997.

Ella MacLeod, the wife of Willie John MacLeod who was the Church of Scotland minister for Tiree between 1963-1971, worked as the nurse on the island for a few months in 1963 and then as relief for Nettie MacKinnon.

Jean Bonar, the wife of Dr. Bonar, also worked as relief nurse while she lived on Tiree from 1959-1966.



Nurse Jean Bonar.

Nettie Lamont (b. 1937) from Balevullin, trained in Glasgow, qualifying in 1959. She returned to Tiree in November 1963 and became the island's full time nurse. She married John MacKinnon, Balemartine, and stopped full-time work in 1968. Since then she has worked part-time as relief nurse.



Nettie MacKinnon née Lamont in 1961.

Freda Davidson from Anoghill, near Ballymeena in Northern Ireland arrived in 1968. She had planned to travel to Africa, and came to Tiree intending not to stay long. In 1969 she spent a year as ward sister at the Southern General in Glasgow and while there she made many trips on the air ambulance.

In her absence, Tiree was covered by **Nancy Cameron** (née Gunn) from Mannal. Freda returned in 1970 and married Alec MacArthur, Heylipol. She left the island in 1992 and lives in her home village in Northern Ireland.

Flora MacKinnon (née **MacLean**) trained in Glasgow. She started work in 1982 as relief nurse and later became full time nurse.

Helen Lane came to the island for 17 months in 1994. She then worked on a leprosy project in Amazonas, Brazil. She is currently working in a hospice in Romford, Essex.



**The opening of the Continuing Care Unit at Taigh a' Rudha in 1991.
L-R: Dr John Holliday, Cairin MacLeod, Jane Williams, Storm Kemp, Mairi MacLean, Anne MacKinnon, Flora MacKinnon, Chair of Argyll & Clyde Health Board Bob Reid.**

Currently, the community nurses are **Storm Kemp, Mairi MacLean, Kate Brown, Anne MacKinnon** and **Sylvia Pearson**.

Traditional Medicine

A knowledge of traditional healing has survived more strongly on Tìree than in many other parts of the Highlands. Indeed one traditional cure survives on the island for a disease, *barr a' chinn*, that seems not to have been described elsewhere.

Before a permanent doctor came to Tìree in the 1850s, local traditional healers were the only resource for most islanders.

Even after this, many people either could not afford the doctor's fees or felt that their treatment was not always effective. This was particularly true in the days before modern drugs. Indeed, some early medical practices were definitely harmful. For example, the bleeding of patients until they almost fainted, only stopped in the 1860s.

As medical treatment under the NHS has become more available and more effective, so has the use of traditional treatment became less common. However, the traditional treatment of diseases not recognised by orthodox medicine, for example, *barr a' chinn*, has continued, the most recent case being in 1997.

Barr a' chinn (the top of the head)

This has been a common disease on Tìree, although it seems not to be found elsewhere. Children up to the age of 14 were affected. It was usually caused by a fright, for example being bitten on the face by a dog or surprised by a hen flying out of a barn. After this the child would become pale, listless and lose his or her appetite. They were commonly taken to several doctors and hospitals who were unable to understand their illness.

It was said the condition could be diagnosed by asking the child to look up. If you were unable to see a line of white under their pupils, they had *barr a' chinn*. The illness was caused by the descent of two bones in the roof of the mouth. There were two cures, physical and herbal.

In the physical cure, the healer's index and middle finger or thumb (or in the case of Donald Sinclair, a spoon) were pressed against the roof of the mouth, pushing the 'bones' back. This is remembered as being quite painful. The main healers were *Bean a' Stìolaich* (Mary Ann MacNeill, originally from Bailephuill - "*An Stìolach*" was the nickname of her husband) - and *Mairi Bhiltidh* (Mary MacLean), both from Balevullin; *Mairi 'Bel* (Mary Kennedy), Kilmoluaig; *Bean Ailein Eachainn* (Effie MacLean, or *Oighrig Lachainn Uilleim*, originally from Fionnphort on Mull), Balemartine; and *Dòmhnall Chaluim Bàin* (Donald Sinclair), West Hynish.

The herbal treatment uses the plant sea pink, known locally as *barr a' chinn*. This was collected on the day of the treatment, dried by the fire (or nowadays in the oven) then put into a small cotton or linen bag. This was sewn onto the front or back of the patient's vest.

Both treatments were accompanied by a rhyme. It was also said that *Mairi Bhiltidh* on Tiree could treat someone in Glasgow suffering from *barr a' chinn*. It is believed that a healer's powers are lost when he/she teaches the cure to another person.



Sea pink or *bàrr a' chinn*.

Tinneas an Rìgh (the King's illness)

This is a scrofula, tuberculosis of the neck glands, and could be treated by the 7th daughter or son. It was so called because it was also believed the King could cure it by touch. Charles I, alone, treated 100,000 people with the disease. On Tiree healing for this was done in recent times by Vindy MacKay, Balemartine, who herself was a 7th daughter. The cure had not previously been in the family and she was born with her healing gift. Indeed the first patient asked for her help when she was only seven, and she had to be lifted onto the kitchen bench to reach his neck.

She crossed her hands over the swellings three times the first day, four times the next day and seven times the next. She could not be paid in money, but was later often given a gift by her patients.

The last patient on Tiree with *tinneas an rìgh* was treated in the 1960s.

A' bhuidheachd (jaundice)

A' bhuidheachd was treated on Tiree until the 1970s by Donald Sinclair (*Dòmhnall Chaluim Bàin*), West Hynish. The cure had originally come from Mull and had been learnt by Donald from Margaret Sinclair, *Bean Iain Mhòir*, from the *Bail' Ur*. The cure's details are secret, but involved the healer going to the shore with a bottle (lemonade bottles were often used latterly) and collecting water from the seventh wave, also placing seven pebbles in the bottle. He then walked to the house of the patient. If he spoke to anyone on the way there, the cure would not work. In his later years Donald would be given a lift in a car but he still refused to speak on the way to the patient.

Once there, he traced the sign of the cross on the patient's back with water from the bottle and was given a small piece of bread out of which the jaundiced person had taken a bite.

Donald passed the cure on to his sister who has passed it onto her son. This cure had to be passed from man to woman to man.

All these three cures were repeated three times, either on a Thursday, Sunday and Thursday, or on a Sunday, Thursday and Sunday. Sunday was the Lord's Day and Thursday was the second holiest day of the week, the birthday of Colum Cille (St. Columba) and a day "when [the saint] used to go to heaven when he wished ... while he was alive!"¹

Cìoch do chinn (the uvula of your head)

This illness was caused by the descent of the uvula at the centre of the soft palate inside the mouth. The throat was usually sore. The healer, of whom *Mairi Bhiltidh* and *Peigi Alasdair* (the mother of Ailig MacLean, the Estate's ground officer in Heylipol) are still remembered, said a spell over a red thread which was then worn around the throat.

The spell for this illness, collected by Dr. Fraser from Inverness in 1896 on the mainland, went, "*Ann an ainm an Athar, a' Mhic agus an Spioraid Naoimh, aur cìoch-shlugan AB.*" (In the name of the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit for the uvula of AB)

Martin Martin, in 1695, noted a neat cure on one of the other islands, when a loop of hair was threaded through a quill and the uvula cut off with this snare.

Leòmhnanagan (styes)

These were cured by *Bean a' Stiolaich*, Balevullin, with a gold hat pin which was held against the sty. She then chanted "*leòmhnanagan a h- aon, leòmhnanagan a - dha*", up to "*leòmhnanagan a - naoi, leòmhnanagan falbh!*" (Stye one, stye two stye nine, stye go away!) This was last done in the 1950s.

Tobraichean (wells)

The water from several wells on Tìree were thought to have healing properties. Amongst these were:

- *Tobar an Dòmhaich* (the well of our Lord), Middleton. This well was described by Martin Martin when he visited the island in 1695 as "*by the natives drunk as a catholicon [cure] for diseases.*"
- *Tobar an Dèideadh* (the well of the toothache), Hynish.
- *Tobar nan Ban Ruadh* (well of the red women), or *Tobar an leighis* (the well of healing) Earnal.



Tobar an Dèideadh in Hynish.

Duslach na gaoith 'n ear - dheas (dust of the south-easterly wind)

Wind from the south east was believed to carry disease from the mainland. Washing and even sheep became a grey colour as the wind brought dust from the heavy industries in the central belt.

Fliuch casan a' chait (water in which a cat's paws have been dipped)

This cure was described on Tiree, by the Reverend John Gregorson Campbell in 1874:

"An elder of the church, who was witness to the ceremony some fifty years ago, thus describes it (and he is a person very likely to have been observant even in his boyhood).

'When a little boy, I wandered into a neighbour's house, very likely with a piece of seaweed in my hand, and chewing away at it, as the manner of boys is. There was a child in the house very ill, but I did not think or know of this when I entered. I suppose the little thing had not sucked its mother's breast, or taken any nourishment, for some days previously. An old woman, who came to inquire for it, on learning its condition, took a bowl half full of water from a large tub (farmail) that was in the house, and putting it on her knees began to mutter over it. I was too young at the time to be heeded, and was not put out of the house. After muttering for a while, the old woman began to yawn, and such yawning I have never seen in all my days. She yawned and yawned and yawned again, till I thought she was going to die. The cat's paws were dipped in the bowl on her knee, and a red thread, brought by a girl belonging to the house, on being also dipped in the water, was put around the child's neck.

'The water used must be that in which the 'hunter's feet' have been dipped (uisge casan an t-sealgair) and the cat is the hunter most readily available. The muttered words are the charm, which gives the whole ceremony its efficacy and the yawning commences when the child's illness is being transferred to the person who performs the ceremony.'"

Self - Treatments

The following cures have been collected on Tìree:

- ❑ The seed pods of *Luibh na Frainge* (tansy) were preserved in whisky. Two or three pods were given as a dose for worms.



Tansy.

- ❑ Rock salt was heated, put into a sock and put against a sore.
- ❑ Bread and sugar or warm cowpats were used as poultices for boils.
- ❑ Snail slime was painted onto warts. The snails were then hung on a barbed wire fence. When they rotted, so did the warts.
- ❑ Black pepper in tea was used for wind.
- ❑ Pepper and brown paper were held on the cheek for toothache.
- ❑ *Tribhileach* (bogbean) was cleaned and boiled and the infusion drunk as a treatment for arthritis and stomach ache. This cure came from Mull.
- ❑ Fresh milk was put into a small *crogan* that had been heated in the fire and drunk as a cure for consumption (tuberculosis).

- Carageen, a small red seaweed, is boiled with milk which then sets to form a pudding that is still used for indigestion.
- *Snalascg*, known elsewhere as *slàn lus* (plantain) - leaves were laid on festering wounds to draw poison.
- *Leamhnach* (tormentil) - a decoction of the roots in milk was given as a cure for diarrhoea.



Plantain and tormentil.

- Copper coins were placed under a bandage over arthritic joints.
- Soup made with *feanntagan* (nettles) was said to be particularly good for those suffering from chickenpox.
- *Salach nan geòidh* (goose droppings) were rubbed onto chilblains as a cure.

Infectious Disease

Until recent times, infectious disease has been a constant threat. From the middle of the nineteenth century, Sanitary Laws were applied on Tiree to keep the island clean and infected patients were isolated.

In 1892 the Sanitary Inspector visited the island and cautioned “*several parties in regard to dung heaps in my opinion too near to houses*”. There were several cases of scarlet fever in Balemartine School, which was closed until the schoolroom had been disinfected. There was a case of typhus fever in Moss, and “*every precaution was used to have the case isolated, the whole family removed to another house, with the exception of the patient’s mother who nursed him.*”

It was the custom for people infected by smallpox to be nursed and buried only by those who had had the illness and survived. The great grandfather of Alasdair Sinclair, Broc, insisted, however, on burying his sister (who had died from smallpox) himself, and he consequently caught the disease. Although he survived, customers avoided the shop he ran in Ruaig and his business never recovered.

In 1893 three people died from typhoid which affected Balephuill. In one two-room house the ten occupants went down with the disease one after the other. Later that year a girl travelling from Belgium developed smallpox, but Dr. Buchanan, having been alerted by telegram, met her at the pier and immediately isolated her. No further cases developed.

In 1895 an epidemic of scarlet fever, which was traced to a young Balevullin man who had returned from working in Glasgow, swept through Tiree. The disease spread through Heylipol, Cornaig and Balemartine schools which were closed.

A religious revival also helped the spread of the disease. Dr. Buchanan reported, “*some of these school rooms were used by these religious enthusiasts [and] were often overcrowded ... I was told on credible authority that some of these meeting houses were so packed that the foul air extinguished the lamps and the lime walls were wet with fetid exhalations.*”

The County Medical Officer, Dr. McNeill, had recommended the building of an isolation hospital on the island in 1893. In 1905 the Mull and District Committee built the Fever Hospital in Heanish. Cases of infectious disease were admitted there and looked after by nurses who were brought in from the mainland.

It was designed by Speirs & Co (as was the Reading Room in Scarinish) and made of corrugated iron lined with wood. A two-bedded ward was set at each end of the building with a kitchen, nurse’s room and bathroom in the centre. 2000 cubic feet of space was allowed per patient. Outside was a washhouse, mortuary, disinfecting room and coalhouse. It was used within months when two families went down with diphtheria following contact with a girl from Renfrewshire.

However, in 1927 Dr. Hunter reported that it was only occasionally used and that it was, in fact, let out to a family, *Iain* and *Magaidh Iain 'ic Nèill* (MacKinnons) on condition that they had to leave at once if the hospital was needed for patients.

It was last used in the 1940s and then let to the Council roadmen, Tommy Stewart and subsequently Donald MacNeill. It was sold in the 1960s as a private house.



The Fever Hospital on Heanish machair.

Some families refused to use the Fever Hospital and the infection nurse from the mainland would then look after them in their own homes. There was an understandable fear of the infection spreading and many affected houses were shunned by their neighbours.

One islander, looking back to an episode of illness in her own family in the 1930s, tells of the clandestine visits by a few kindly neighbours who would only come round under cover of darkness or creep to the house behind walls to visit. Later, when she walked down the road, people would leave the path to avoid any contact with the disease.

The Ambulance

In 1906, the Mull District Committee recommended that a hand-pulled ambulance carriage be provided for Tiree. The County Medical Officer advised them instead to send the horse-drawn ambulance carriage from Salen in Mull if required. However, those in Salen objected and Tiree was given its own horse-drawn ambulance in 1907.

No one alive today remembers this being used and until the Second World War it is likely that sick people needing transport would be moved by one of the few private cars on the island. During the war the RAF base provided ambulances and until 1982 the airport firemen, chief among them Willie Lyons, would man the airport ambulance in emergencies.

Dr. MacLean remembers a call-out around 1976:

“I can recall having to summon the Air Ambulance one stormy night to evacuate a prominent citizen requiring urgent surgery. Only one fireman was available to man the airport (other two away on a training course), so I personally had to collect the old Bedford ex RAF ambulance and drive it to the patient’s house and back again to the airport. When I arrived I was told the plane’s ETA was in 10 minutes and would I please dash out to the runway and light the paraffin flares or he would not find the landing strip. I was still lighting the last flare, difficult in high wind(!), when I heard the plane overhead and dashed back to my patient in the ambulance.

“The plane landed safely, but the pilot radioed that it would not be possible for him to taxi onto the apron as he was having difficulty keeping the plane stable on the ground, so once again I got into the driving seat and drove the old Bedford out to the plane. It started to rain and the nurse and I got thoroughly wet transferring our patient into the small space on that little Loganair Islander which was bouncing up and down on the tarmac.”



John Brady, May Margaret MacDonald and Neil Munn.

In 1982 the service was taken over by the Scottish Ambulance Service. Neil MacLean, Kenovay, the manager of the Crossapol knitwear factory, was their first contractor, followed by James Munro the minister. Neil Munn, the current contractor, started in 1984. He is currently assisted by May Margaret MacDonald and John Brady.

Dentists

The first dentist to work here regularly was **Gilbert Cadden** from Glasgow. On his first trip to the island, he came by boat with his brother, also a dentist, and they did some dentistry on board. He subsequently used a building at the airport, while his brother visited Tobermory. He was an excellent golfer.



Mr. Bill Weatherston.

Bill Weatherston set up a dental practice in the Reading Room in 1968 when he was 63. Born in Glasgow, a tenth child, he had originally wanted to train as a chef. He qualified in dentistry instead, winning the gold medal in his year for practical work.

He worked for many years in Bridgeton Cross in Glasgow. One of his patients there was working on Tiree, and on his recommendation, the family started to take their holidays in Vault.

In 1969, he took over the Barra practice as well, spending one week a month up north. He worked until he became ill in 1983, and used to say, as he looked out of his surgery window at the sea “*All this, and a little dentistry too!*”



The mobile dental unit at Baugh in 2001 with dentist Derrik Lamb on left and dental nurse Margaret Dowell on the right.

He was followed by Bill MacFarlane, then Chris Price from Tobermory, and currently Derrik Lamb.

Lament to Dr. Alexander Buchanan

by

Donald MacDonald, Milton (1858 - 1919)

from *Na Baird Thirisdeach*

My mind is heavy and depressed remembering days gone by
Today, my sorrow that he who was at Baugh
Is no more, has grown
A man who was so beloved by the people
A most noble doctor
Now lying in his grave
Is sleeping the sleep of death

Over fifty famous years
He made his home in Tìree
Rarely would a land see his like
Nor the scholarship which enhanced him
Rarely would you see anyone with his skill
He possessed gifts from the Above
And gifts that were made for his time
To make the sick healthy

Many were they who were in great pain
Causing them suffering and misery
He gave them relief from their problem
And guided them towards good health
He earned the goodwill of the people
Because of his gentle attitude towards their trouble
There will never come to our land in this generation
Another who will take his place.

His knowledge of every disease was complete
His gentle healing was mistaken
The benefits he gave on our behalf are a credit
To his country and profession
Large is the gap left among our gentry
That he is gone forever
A shadow has lain over every corner of the land
Since his day has ended.

His widow and kindly family
Are sorrowing on his account
The home which was always so hospitable
Laments for the one who is now under the turf
The home which was welcoming at all times
And charitable above all others
In giving a good opportunity to the poor
And hospitality to strangers

His door was always open
With Godliness and kindness
Many were the poor, weak beggars
Whom he helped in his day
In his home you would get hospitality
And kindness night and day
But every light was extinguished
And the beauty of Baugh has changed

He was indeed a prince among doctors
It is a great pity he has died
His manner suited his profession
Dutifully, according to his intimations
Did he bear the burden and heat of the day
Lovingly and successfully
It is his humility in serving the suffering
That earned him so much love.

Although his ashes return to the ground
His name will forever be remembered
Young and old will mention
How he has a high regard for justice
His accomplishments, so numerous
Cannot be told in song
Although I wish I could take more pleasure
In adding a stone to his cairn.

Translated by Flora MacPhail.