

# Sgoiltean Thiriodh Lessons from Tìree

*There is a saying among the people that, "if Tìree does not grow trees, it grows ministers and deep sea captains."* ADA GOODRICH FREER, 1894

The first school on Tìree was set up around 1780 and by 1845 there were eight schools on the island, most of them run by the churches and the Duke of Argyll. They were not all successful. In Heylipol, *the classroom is a low thatched building, the side walls only about five feet high, neither floored nor plastered and very badly lighted. The appearance of the classes was as unfavourable as that of the building itself.*

In 1872 the government took over and built five schools on Tìree – Ruaig, Scarinish, Balemartine, Heylipol and Cornaigmore. Schooling became compulsory for the first time. However, there were other attractions for the pupils. *A steamer was wrecked last week near Skerryvore lighthouse and most of the children are searching for wreckage.*

BALEMARTINE SCHOOL LOG, 1899



New Cornaigmore School opened in 1936

*Christmas Day did not used to be a holiday. Today is Christmas elsewhere, but not so in Tìree - at least no one knows or cares anything about it here. We are working away as busily as on any other day.*

BALEMARTINE SCHOOL LOG, 1896



Shinty on the school playing fields in the 1930s

Arithmetic was taught using an abacus and chanting tables. A typical arithmetical question for primary pupils was, *Divide £309 10s. 10d. among 2 sappers, 5 artillerymen and 7 marines, giving a sapper twice the share of an artilleryman who gets thrice that of a marine.*

*Rough work was done on a slate into the 1930s. When we went to school first of all we were given a slate for writing on and doing your lessons. And we used to take them home at Christmas and Easter and scrub them and clean them up and have them ready for going back to school.*

HECTOR MACKINNON, CORNAIGMORE, WHO WENT TO SCHOOL IN CORNAIG IN THE 1930s



School staff with Mr. Morrison Headteacher - Cornaigmore School 1933

*Up to the start of the Second World War most children on Tìree going to school for the first time could speak virtually no English. When we went to school, each and every one of us spoke only Gaelic. [The teacher] spent the first week teaching us nothing more elegant than 'Good morning Miss Nisbet.' In these days she rang a bell and we went into the class and sat down and she arrived two or three minutes later and we jumped to attention and shouted, 'Good morning Miss Nisbet!'*

ANGUS MUNN, SCARINISH SCHOOL

*There were dry toilets and in those days [1950s], the Oban Times was there and that's the toilet paper you used, cut in strips on a nail on the wall.*

ANGUS MACKECHNIE, HEYLIPOL SCHOOL

*We had no drinking water in the school. When you wanted a drink, you ran down to the well at the shore. You never washed your hands and never ailed a thing!*

GRACE CAMPBELL, WHO WENT TO SCARINISH SCHOOL IN 1927