



Newsletter of An Iodhlann's members

Welcome to the spring 2019 issue of *Sìl Eòlais*, the newsletter of *An Iodhlann*. In this issue, we have two new accessions that in a sense are coming 'home', plus features about not one but three factors.

Written in the Landscape

The three-year project to open up the archives at Inveraray and Lochgilphead comes to a climax on Tìree this month with a three-day festival of talks and exhibitions featuring some of the most precious items from the collections. Inveraray Castle is reckoned to hold the finest private collection of records in Scotland going back to the seventeenth century, and this really is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to get face-to-face with the fascinating and untold history of our island.



A 1680 map of Tìree, sketched before the Campbells won control of the island. It includes several townships that have not survived: for example, Murdost south of Hough and Balaig east of Balephetrish.

Monday 13 May

Exhibition opens in *An Talla* at 7pm with a glass of wine followed by an introduction by Alison Diamond and Hannah Baker from Inveraray Castle and Jackie Davenport, the archivist for Argyll and Bute Council.

Tuesday 14 May

Another exhibition opens in *An Iodhlann* from 10am to 4pm.

A detailed lecture on rare and unusual documents found in the archives in *An Talla* at 7pm.

Wednesday 15 May

Exhibition open in *An Iodhlann* from 10am to 4pm.

A lecture on paleography (reading old handwriting!) in *An Talla* at 7.30pm.

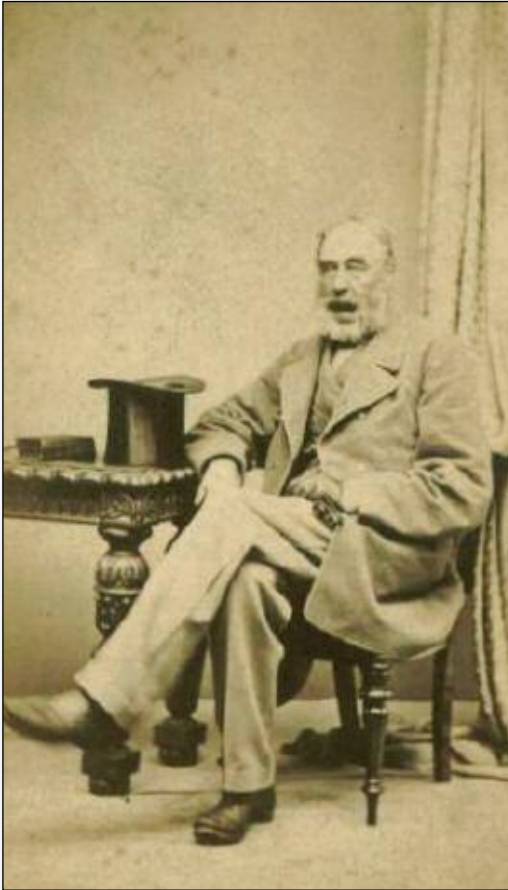
Thursday 16 May

Bird-watching walk with John Bowler starting at 10am. Closing session with talks by John Bowler, Dr John Holliday, Alison Diamond, Hannah Baker and Jackie Davenport.

ALL THESE EVENTS AND TALKS ARE FREE!

Copies of documents from the Inveraray Castle and Argyll and Bute Council archives continue to pour into *An Iodhlann*, many transcribed by a team of volunteers, to whom we are very grateful. The following letter from John Campbell, factor to the eighth Duke of Argyll shows the uncompromising attitude, at the time, towards the relief of poverty. This was four years after the start of the great potato famine on Tìree.

It also demonstrates the estate's policy of cleansing the island of 'troublesome characters':



John Campbell (1801-1872), Chamberlain of the Duke of Argyll for Mull and Tiree from 1846 to 1864. His long, thin legs gave him the nickname Am Bàillidh Mòr 'the tall factor'.

Ardfenaig Jany 1st 1850

My Lord Duke

... I am acting in conformity to your Graces instructions to the utmost of my ability in the employment of the able bodied poor. I give no work save to the really poor and who have large families. I am obliged to adopt a fixed rate for the work, as I give no meal except in return for the amount of labour performed. If I were giving allowance in meal, barely equal to the support of life according to the number in the respective families, I should not be able to get nearly value in work for the meal given. I keep them on sufficiently short allowance, so much so that when the families are very large I am obliged to give a few turnips to assist their feed in case they starve...

Should small Crofters with small families get work and at a higher rate they would not save a farthing. They would just work as much as would support them and no more, such is their general character. Nothing less than absolute want will force the greater number to assert themselves ... Now that the people are brought to learn they must work for their feed, matters get on comparatively smoothly.

Besides, a great number of the worst and most troublesome characters went off last emigration, which makes the residue more easily managed.

But I have no doubt so soon as the relief Board [the Central Board of Management for Highland Relief] begin their operations if on the former principle, matters will be as bad as ever [and] the people will be brought back to their wonted habits of indolence and stubbornness.

I intend going to Tiree as soon as the weather permits and shall make out a list of these people at risk who are entitled to Committee, and so that if your Grace does not intend to carry on drainage works this year they can be struck off and thrown on the Com[mittee].

I have the honour to be My Lord Duke, your Grace's,
Most obt & Faithfull S[ervan]t,
John Campbell

Other papers come from the office of the Procurator Fiscal in Tobermory. This case, eventually dismissed, shows the close links between Coll and Tiree at that time, tensions within a small community and an interesting perspective on freemasonry.

Theft of Drugget

Tyree 19 September 1863

Margaret Paterson, residing with Widow Campbell at Arinagour, Island of Coll ... says on or about the 15 or 20th day of June 1863 I had a web of Drugget [coarse woollen cloth] weaving at Tyree. It was sent to Caolis, Coll, with Charles MacFadyen, son of Neil MacFadyen, Caolis, Tyree. It lay for a fortnight in the Inn at Caolis, and was sent to Arinagour along with other things that was going to the Steamer. It was sent in a mistake on board the Steamer to Glasgow – and no address being upon it, it was brought back to Coll and delivered to Donald MacFadyen, cottar at Arinagour, who delivered the web to the said Margaret Paterson, who says that 4 yards

was taken of the piece [of] drugget. She said to me she did not know who did this. She said it might be done at Caolis or might be done at Tyree, but now she says she suspects Donald MacFadyen, Arinagour, and that his house ought to be searched.

I do not know what to say to her as it went through so many hands She is not a very good character. She said to me that a Freemason had been telling her that Donald MacFadyen at Arinagour had it hid in his House, and she also said that the Freemasons can tell any thing that is stolen.

I am Sir your obt Servant
Duncan cr

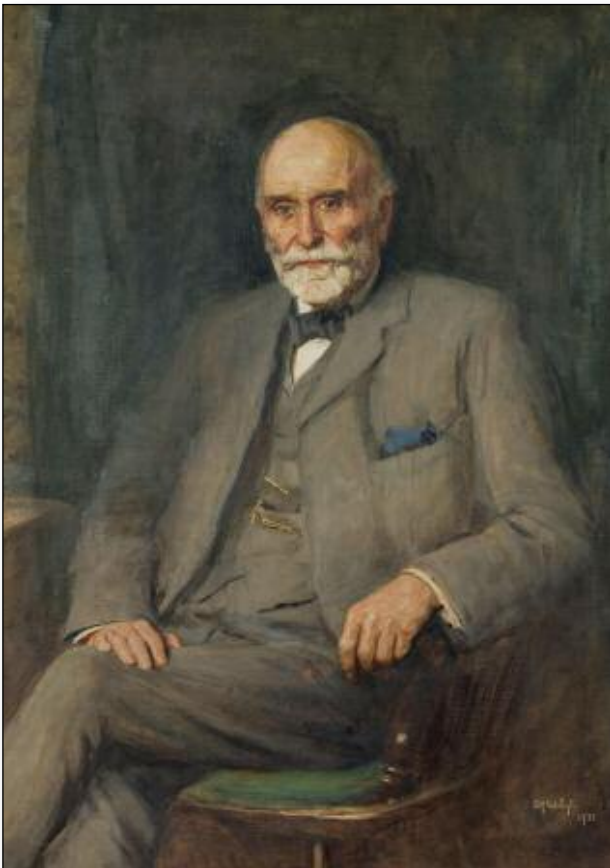
Black and orange striped drugget with blue cotton tasselled fringe, made from Tiree wool and woven in Tiree, found in Salum House in the late 19th or early 20th century.



Written in the Landscape has been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, Argyll and Bute Council, Tiree Community Windfall Trust, *An Iodhlann*, Argyll Estates, Inveraray Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme, the Clan Campbell Education Foundation and private donations.

Am Bàillidh Dubh: the Dark Factor

It was Ian Atkins, Balephuill, who alerted us. Ian is great enthusiast for, and collector of, paintings by the Tiree artist Duncan MacGregor Whyte. In January, an auction house in Knoxville, Tennessee, was selling one of his paintings, a substantial portrait of the Tiree factor Hugh MacDiarmid. One thing led to another, and it is now hanging in *An Iodhlann*. We did try to find out how the painting had ended up in America, but the trail ran cold.



Thirty-year-old Hugh MacDiarmid, the son of a farmer in Blair Atholl, Perthshire, came to Heylipol's Island House in 1876 as factor. It was a turbulent period in the Highlands. Seven years later he found himself in the witness box before Lord Napier at the commission's hearing in Kirkapoll Church. Asked to assure witnesses that the landlord would not target them because of their evidence, MacDiarmid replied: *'I cannot give any such assurance ... [although] I would say the Duke of Argyle won't do anything against any man who will tell the truth.'*

In 1886, he played a pivotal role in provoking the 'land war' on Tiree by giving the tenancy of Greenhill Farm to the brother of the president of the Land League – an organisation fighting on behalf of small crofters and cottars to break up the large island farms. This led to an occupation of Greenhill, the garrisoning of 250 marines on the island, and eight Tiree men appearing in the High Court Edinburgh, where they received prison sentences of six months.

MacDiarmid was the most powerful figure on the island for almost half a century. A Gaelic speaker, he came to hold many civic positions on Tiree, including Justice of the Peace, Trustee of Gott Bay Pier, and membership of the Scarinish Library Committee. The painting's inscription reads: *'Hugh MacDiarmid, Factor, Island House. Presented by the Inhabitants of Tiree for Public Services for over 45 Years. 1922.'*

He married Mary Sproat, the daughter of the Tobermory Procurator Fiscal. She became a great friend of Lady Victoria Campbell, the daughter of the eighth Duke of Argyll, and kept her many projects, like sewing classes, going when Lady Victoria was away from the island. Mary and Hugh had five children, and their household in 1901 included a governess, groom and gardener, cook, housemaid and nurse.



Alongside his estate position, he tenanted 800 acres on the island, and is said to have formed a lucrative partnership with Tom Barr in Balephetrish to buy cattle at advantageous prices. He died in 1928 aged 82 after an extraordinarily long career, during which he proved a loyal servant of the estate and saw the island through one of its most unsettled periods. He left £46,281 in his will, a sum worth over £2 million today, and was succeeded by his son, William George.

The Letters of Duncan Macgregor Whyte

Loyal readers may remember that we featured the artist Duncan Macgregor Whyte back in 2012. Born in Oban in 1886, his grandfather was Rev Archibald Farquharson, who had come to Tiree in 1832 as minister of the independent Congregational chapels in Cornaigmore and Ruaig. MacGregor Whyte trained in Glasgow and Paris, where he met his wife, the painter Mary Bernard.

Making a living as an artist in the west of Scotland appears to have been hard. In 1911, the ambitious MacGregor Whyte left his wife and two sons Tearlach, 6, and John, 1, in Oban to try to make his name in America and Canada. This proved harder than he anticipated, and he continued on to Australia, where his brothers were then living. Many of his letters home have been preserved in a university library in Queensland. I have transcribed a small selection to give a flavour of his travels and the difficulties and frustrations of his life abroad:

November 1911 *'Steamer Caledonia: We are now being towed down the river ... That made rather a change in my packing. My dress clothes had to be taken to my cabin. A nuisance, but as he himself said: 'You may meet people who will be of use to you' ... We are now making for the open sea and the hills of Argyllshire white-capped. It is warm where I write this in the Music Room ... There is someone playing a Gaelic song on the piano ... Ah, Mon Dieu! What company. There are few saloon passengers and certainly the second cabin was noisy – full of kids – poor wee souls and the working class – decent people but sometimes getting up one's sleeve ... Before rounding the north into Moville [Donegal], this seahorse rolled her best and drove me downstairs. There everything was so snug, I lay in comfort on my couch with window open and the relief tempted me to remain. I was very ill ... The wind was so terrific that I was nearly blown off my feet and clung to a rail in shelter of her huge black funnel. You have seen seas on a fine day off Ceann a Mara, where they rise in quick succession and take from your vision the usual horizon ... They were the skyline, spitting, hissing, moaning, grey-green tortuous monsters with deep valleys between. Actually made me giddy to look down into the caverns beyond the steamer ... One stout American lady sitting in a wickerwork chair slid from one side of the music room to the other, and that kept us in laughter ... She was telling the captain about it and he said 'Oh! That's what made her lurch so badly!' A little band plays at lunch and dinner in the music room ... It is most amusing.*

'At night Young [a fellow passenger] and myself made a little stir by coming in late to dinner and dressed. Your hub [husband] in Highland kilt and he in ordinary dress. Mon Dieu, things hummed! After dinner we

fought for a reel and managed by aid of a Purser as lady to do it in the wide corridor. The band was in the music room but the din of the wind and sea prevented us from hearing. We took them out and went at it like wild Indians, the boat rolling and plunging, and we mad ones flung from side to side but sticking to it like barnacles to a rock. The American ladies crowded round, the captain and others squatted on the stairs, stewards sneaking round corners, old Scotsmen caught the fever and they had no use but soon to sit or fall. I poured with perspiration particularly circling in the Highland Scottische with my male friend all the time trying to fight the roll. They laughed and clapped and I whooped hoochs like a Highlandman ... Gad, I'd never travel but first class. The other class is no use, and I was disgusted there ... Do not lose the letter, as in after years, if spared, it will be give me pleasure to recall the most interesting experience of many years.'

He landed in New York, but soon moved to Toronto where he had more contacts:

December 1911: *'I did no business and so the main issue was a failure ... No more sales though the other day I met a man Cooper who had been at my show and said he did take one of my Loch--- pictures - an old stager of a picture for £30. That is not much. Oh I wish I could get out of here. I rarely meet any clever people to converse with.'*

January 1912: *'I hardly feel like writing as there has been no business yet. I have made a number of acquaintances and hope to make many more, and surely from the many I shall be able to do business. I go wherever I am invited in the hope of meeting more.'*

February 1912: *'I have been busy hunting a studio and think at last I have tracked one down at \$17 a month. Rents are awful, but for a few months only ... I wish I were a spell in Perth, Western Australia, now with Duncan and Mairi. But the getting there is the difficulty. My passage is only to Sydney and from there John [his brother] wants me up country ... If I could now make one \$100 sale I'd be off ... Love to you dearest ones. I sometimes feel sick by the way and wish to speak to you. No friends like old friends.'*

March 1912: *'A Canadian was in my studio yesterday and he said there is no one to touch you at that game here. Ach, but damn! They cling to dollars like limpets.'*



Duncan MacGregor Whyte's portrait of his son John, known as 'Bunty'. While serving as an Ordinary Seaman on the HMS Sir William Hilary as part of the Royal Navy Patrol Service in the English Channel, he was lost in action in 1942 at the age of 33.

1913: *'Sydney: Sorry, sorry to hear of Lord Archibald's death [Lord Archibald Campbell, the second son of the eighth Duke of Argyll, died on 29 March 1913 at the age of 67. He had been a strong advocate for Gaelic, as was DMW]. I got the papers too. Poor Lord A. I loved the man. He was so kind and good to me. I opened the papers in Hyde Park [Sydney] and when I saw the pictures I had to get my handkerchief out.'*

1913: *'I do not know what to say to you. I am so utterly done for and yet not despairing quite. My pictures are still in Horden's [a department store in Sydney] but no sale so far. I hope this has reached you that I may be able to cable you money. I suppose if the worst comes to the worst I must sell by auction and that is the last move. I can but trust God you may have a merrier Christmas than I can see for you. This place I'd never return to or think of coming to had I known. They are nicer than Canadians in many ways but no ambition for good pictures. Too far removed from the influence of Europe.'*

1914: *'Sydney For the last three weeks I have been painting on the beaches. I had to stand awful cheek down in Coogee. It was a holiday. It was the nearest to town and the roughest go there. Well it is no joke to paint figures however small, let alone do so in front of a jeering crowd ... If only I had begun this surfing business before Christmas. But I was scared to go in their midst;*

now I steel myself to. Some of them are very nice. I got an elegant lassie into one of my pictures. It was at Bronte. I could not get a boy to pose properly. Then this tall slip of a girl in tight bathing costume along with another friend whom I had spoken before then came over asking if they'd do, if they could help me. Immediately they got into it. I did not get them finished then but the following Saturday I went hoping to get the tall one. Presently a rustle in the rocks and grass behind me and there she was like a wild elegant creature. 'Oh Goodness! Won't you pose for me? I want to finish your arm.' 'If you won't be long.' Off she went and took her place. Decent soul. She was amused at me I know. I could not help looking at her knees as she squatted down beside me. But they are so used to this business of late years that they do not think they are in a semi-nude condition. It is lovely, I like it. Such a chance of studying the figure in sunlight. The only trouble is the black bathing costumes. The colour of the sea is just like Tiree. I know people will take some of [these paintings] for Tiree.'

1919: 'I am teaching in the technical school, Freemantle, Mondays and Thursdays, 2-9pm. I rather like it as it is a steady game and my pupils are interesting ... I sent money recently to D MacArthur to get Studio [his house in Balephuil] tarred, and last year too, but received no answer. Guess he did not receive it. I sent you a £1 PO [postal order] but never heard more of it, and if you have not received it, then I'm too late to reclaim it. It is awful to think that cabled money should have been so long. A letter would have carried as quickly. Yes, I long for Tiree, but what is to keep us alive there. I'd give anything to be there for the boys' sake. They will never know its experience unless they [see] it in their youth, and here I am held by lack of money, like a fool listening to Duncan and Marie who begged me to come, and here I am alone ... I am sending by cable next week £20 through the Commonwealth Bank, London. I would give a good deal to be at Rothnest now, or better Tiree. I'm afraid things are awful at home just now ... This is a poor country, sand everywhere. The farmers and fruit growers are the poorest lot of folks here ... up in the west the pastoralists are very wealthy, but they own places as big as Ireland.'

Letter to his son Tearlach: 'I wish I were with you. Keep up your Gaelic.'

In 1921, at the age of 55, Duncan MacGregor Whyte finally returned to Oban, thereafter spending his summers on Tiree. He died in 1953.

John Geekie

Hugh MacDiarmid's predecessor as chamberlain on Tiree was John Geekie. Recently, Charles Muir from Manitoba, John's great-grandson, sent us his research on the family history. It makes fascinating reading.



Like MacDiarmid, John Miller Matthew Geekie had also come from Perthshire. John started his working life in the grand surroundings of Scone Palace as assistant to his father Peter, the Earl of Mansfield's factor. In 1864, at the age of 24, John was chosen to replace John Campbell, *Am Bàillidh Mòr*. He was promoted over the head of the estate's ambitious ground officer on Tiree, Lachlan MacQuarrie. The older man took the snub badly, particularly as he was then also evicted as tenant of Baugh Farm to make way for Dr Alexander Buchanan and his new wife, Colina Campbell.

MacQuarrie tried to take his revenge by writing to the eighth Duke informing him that the doctor and new factor were often seen drinking together in public. Both men survived these smears, and John served the Duke on Tiree for twelve years. Now covered by a track, a well in front of the Reading Room in Scarinish, where he used to stop for a drink, was known as *Tobar Gigidh*.

Colina Campbell 1841-1930,
wife of Dr Alexander Buchanan

We do not as yet know the circumstances leading to Geekie leaving the island. But we do know that the following year, John, his wife Anne and their three small children emigrated to Manitoba. They travelled with two of his brothers, one of whom had already been out to Canada to establish himself on a block on the banks of the Little Saskatchewan River. We are so used to horrifying emigration stories from the 1850s that it comes as some surprise to find that John's brother Charles made three Atlantic crossings in three years, returning on one occasion with some Highland cattle. And Anne travelled to Canada with family gifts preparing her for the new life – a sword and rifle to keep the Native Americans at bay and a silver tea service. She was also expecting their fourth child, and their son Robert Donald was the first white baby born in the district.

John prospered on his 160-acre block, which he called Glenforsa after a farm in Mull where the airfield is today. Drawing on his experience as an administrator, he became secretary of the municipality and local postmaster. Charles Muir remembers: 'I understand John ran a tight ship. One of my father's stories of this time was that his grandfather was very particular – one of his jobs was to be the driver of the horse and buggy so the grandfather could fetch the mail at the station. The harness on the horse had to be just right, the lines straight and everything in order. The old man would come out of the house and would put his foot on one of the spokes of the front wheels of the buggy. My Dad would then turn the horse so that the wheel turned just enough to lift [him] up to the level of the buggy seat.' John died in 1924 at the age of 84, having made the long journey from Scone Palace to Tiree and thence to Manitoba. A member of the family still runs the Glenforsa farm near Strathclair.



Island House photographed by James Gentes in July 2003 using a remote controlled camera on a kite. The long causeway to the north can clearly be seen.

ARCHIVIST'S CHOICE by Janet Bowler

RAF 518 Squadron badge

This small metal badge bears the crest of RAF 518 Squadron, which was stationed on Tiree during WWII and played a crucial role in determining the date of the D-Day landings. It is the first that *An Iodhlann* has come across, and we are delighted to have been gifted it for the archive. We are not sure of its exact age, but it was manufactured by H.W. Miller Ltd, Birmingham, who had made buttons, badges and medals since 1935. It may have been a cap-badge for service personnel, or it may have been created for an RAF reunion after the war. Any thoughts would be most welcome.

Remarkably, it was found, not in a car boot sale in Britain, but on a sports field in the village of Pareora, South Island, New Zealand, by a local metal-detectorist. Only a handful of New Zealand men were



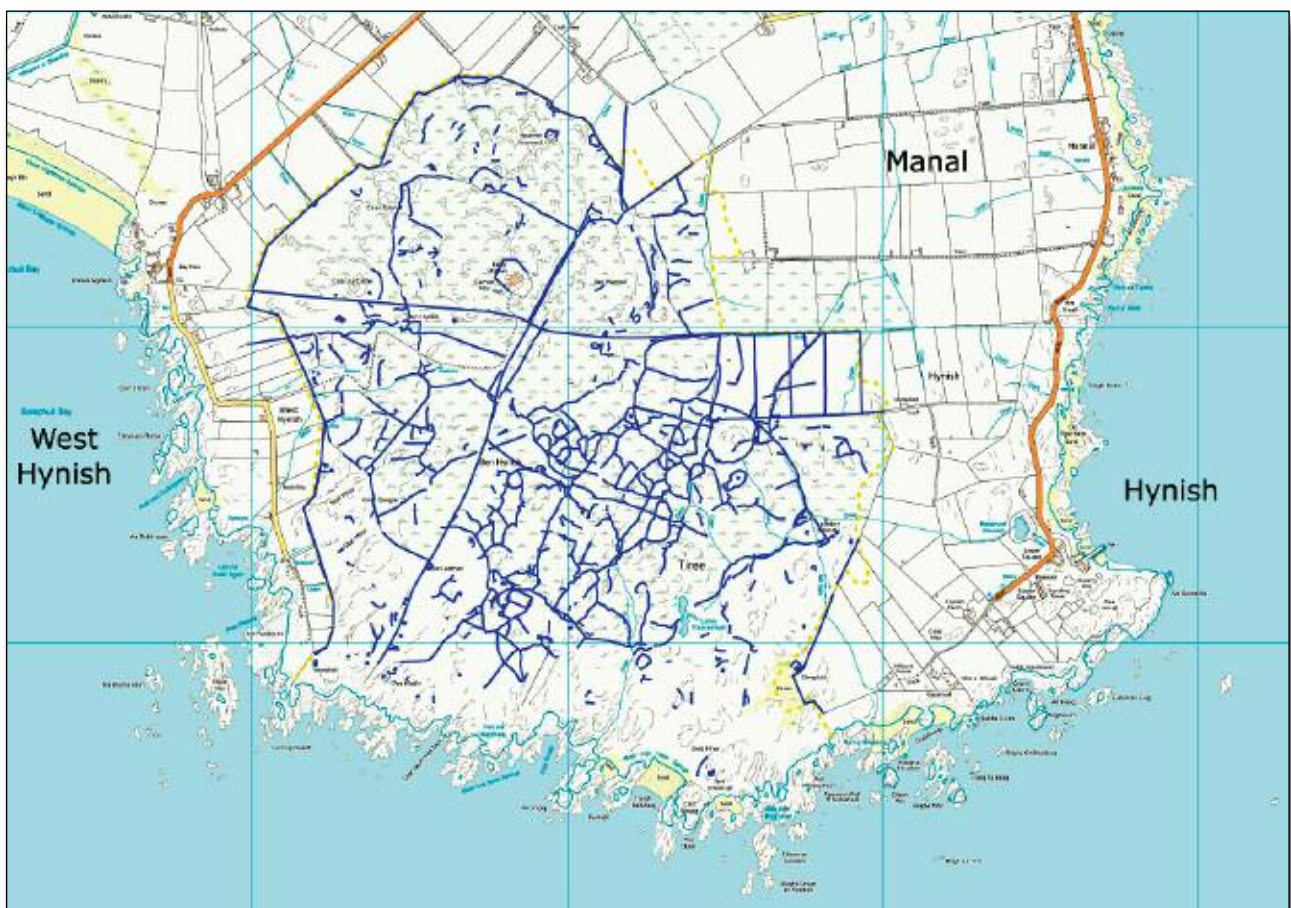
stationed at RAF Tiree during the war, so the chances of finding one of their badges are extremely slim. It is an extraordinary find, and we are grateful to the donor who made the effort to track us down at *An Iodhlann*, wishing to 'return it home'.

It makes me wonder about the young man from Pareora who decided to join the fight at the outbreak of WWII, to be stationed on a tiny, remote island on the other side of the world, and then return to his home in New Zealand, where he dropped his badge during a sports event. I imagine he must have been distraught at losing a cherished memento of Tiree.

Janet Bowler | Archive Manager

Archaeology

Summer 2019 is set to be a busy season for archaeology on Tiree. Dr Colleen Batey and Dr Ewan Campbell from Glasgow University with Dr Heather James have just completed a visit when a number of sites, including the back garden of Island House were tested with geophysics. They did an exploratory dig that has shown that the occupation layers extend 60 cm deeper than the level that we know from dating to be Viking. Charcoal from the lowest level will now be dated, but it looks as though the site is deeper and older than we thought.



The Association of Certificated Field Archaeologists has been surveying old monuments and buildings on the slopes of Ben Hynish for three years. Now they are turning their attention to the dykes that criss-cross the slopes. We know there was a 'lost' medieval farm here called Heren, with the last record coming from 1695. Now we think that some of the 'dragons teeth' walls could be prehistoric, and may date from the Bronze Age.

Thanks to Edward and Ailsa Smith of ACFA for drawing this. Contains Ordnance Survey Data. Crown copyright and database rights 2018

Thank you for your interest in *An Iodhlann* and this island's extraordinary history.

Dr John Holliday