



Newsletter of An Iodhlann's members

Welcome to the autumn edition of *Sìl Eòlais*. We have the history of Tiree's lighthouse (not Skerryvore), news from a group commemorating the 150th anniversary of the Balephuill Fishing Disaster, and some more information on John Lamont of this parish, master boat builder of Hong Kong. Plus a few Vikings thrown in for good measure.

TIREE'S OTHER LIGHTHOUSE

Alan Stevenson's Skerryvore lighthouse may be 'the noblest of all extant deep sea lights', as Robert Louis Stevenson described it, but Tiree has another lighthouse, little noticed today, which also has an interesting tale to tell. Today the Scarinish Light is a functional installation on the headland west of the harbour. I must have driven past it without thinking a thousand times before I started to wonder about its story.



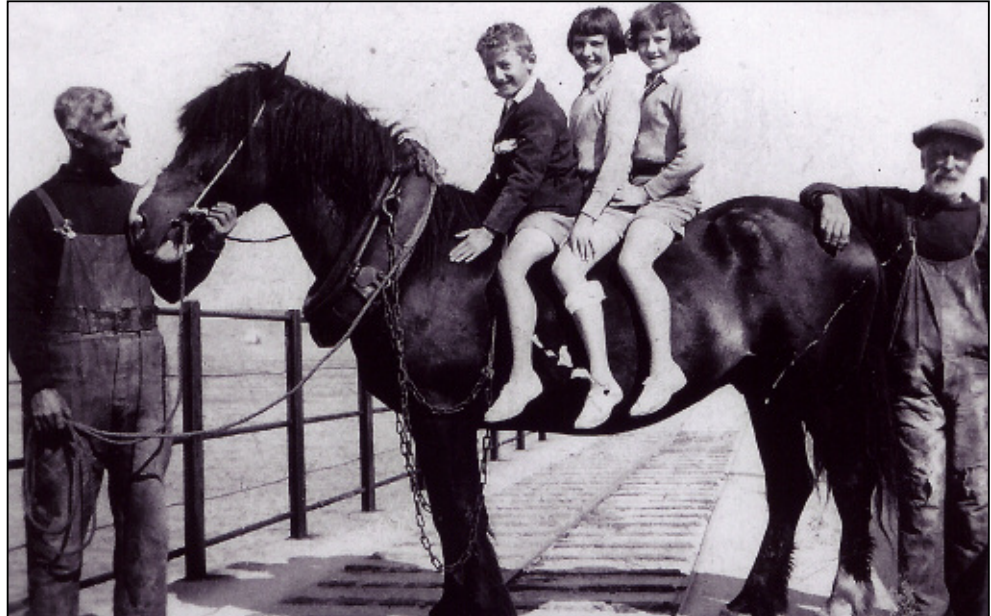
James Stewart MacFadyen (1845-1929), at the Scarinish Lighthouse around 1915. James was the lighthouse keeper. (M Crookston)

The original Scarinish Light was built in 1897 by the Northern Lighthouse Board (NLB). Its designer was another Stevenson - this time David Alan, Alan's nephew and the cousin of Robert Louis. David A Stevenson built 26 lighthouses in his 53 year career, including Ailsa Craig with his uncle Thomas, Muckle Roe Light in Shetland (also in 1897), and the Cairns of Coll in 1909. Set 11 metres above sea level, the Scarinish lighthouse originally had a range of 16 nautical miles, making it a Major Light (a light with a range of more than 15 nautical miles). The Scarinish light flashes white every 3 seconds, while Skerryvore flashes every ten and Coll every twelve seconds.

The Scarinish light was originally powered by paraffin lamps. The first Lightkeeper was James MacFadyen, *Seumas Ailein*, the son of Allan MacFadyen who was the tenant of Scarinish Farm and the Temperance Hotel. By coincidence Allan had also owned a smack that had carried stone from the Ross of Mull to Hynish during the building of Skerryvore lighthouse. The 1891 Census records James as a 'farm servant', presumably working on his father's farm, but in 1901 and 1911 he becomes a 'lightkeeper'. He died aged 85 in 1929, a 'retired lighthouse keeper'. To keep the light flashing the keeper had to trim the wicks every morning and adjust their height; top up the paraffin; clean the soot off the glass and polish the reflector with 'Spanish white' (finely powdered chalk) and a linen cloth; keep a log book including any incidents; and finally light the lamps at sunset and extinguish them at dawn. 365 days a year.

Sometime before 1920 James was succeeded by John 'Noanian' MacDonald, who lived at 'Coll Cottage' in Heanish. John used to impress his young daughter, Jean McEwen, Crossapol, by standing in the front of their house and pretending to be able to remotely control the light coming on and off from where he stood! It was probably in the year 1936 that the Scarinish Light underwent a major overhaul as it was converted from paraffin to carbide. A Notice to Mariners indicating a change in character of the light was issued in that year, and the Shetland archives have a photograph of Scarinish's 'sister' light in Muckle Roe being converted to carbide in 1937.

John MacDonald of Heanish is seen here on the left with visiting children on Gott Bay pier around 1930. John, known as 'Nonian', was the caretaker for Scarinish lighthouse and also worked as a docker at the pier. On the right is Hector MacKinnon (Eachann Dhonnchaidh) of Scarinish. The horse belonged to Alan MacFadyen of Gott. In those days, a railway ran down the centre of the pier and a bogey, pulled by the horse, carried cargo between the ferry or puffer and the pier shed. (J MacDonald)



It was almost fifty years previously that it had been discovered that mixing coke and lime in a hot electric furnace produced the grey granules of calcium carbide. When mixed with water this produced acetylene gas, which burnt with a particularly white flame. This fuel became widely used in bicycle and car headlights, and in mines. From 1910 it began to be used in lighthouses too. A Swedish engineering genius, Gustaf Dalén, joined the Amalgamated Gas Accumulator (AGA) Company to begin work on acetylene. By 1916 he had developed a fully automated lighthouse system that used the power of acetylene production to turn and flash the light and even change the mantle. He also invented a switch, which used the warmth of the sun to extinguish the flame when the sun rose. For this last invention he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Physics. Tragically, during one experiment just before the award ceremony he was blinded by an explosion. His work with the company continued, however, and he went on to invent the Aga cooker in 1922. His marine lights could run unattended for a year, and the Blockhusudden Lighthouse off Stockholm used his mechanism from 1912 to 1980, flashing a total of 400 million times!

John MacDonald, who also worked at the Gott Bay pier, had to adapt to the new system. Work in a similar lighthouse has been described by Scott Reekie from Elie in Fife.

'Before the lighthouse was converted from a flame to a strobe [electric] light bulb the operation of the lighthouse was highly labour intensive. The light had to be tended and serviced 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The lenses and reflectors required that they be kept polished. The gas generator was required to be kept constantly cleaned out and supplied with new batches of calcium carbide. The [clockwork] rotating mechanism had to be kept wound up. The residual sludge from the spent carbide had to be removed.'

Building the new Scarinish Light in 1962. L-R: unknown, Neil MacNeill, Scarinish (Niall an Tailleir), his son Neil MacNeill, and unknown. The old lighthouse in the background was removed. (C MacNeill)



Carbide granules, "like road chippings" as Duncan Cameron recalls, trickled down into two water-filled generators topped up by a semi-rotary hand pump. Calcium carbide turns to slaked lime after reacting with water and giving off acetylene. The lime was removed from the twin generators and put in a sludge tank outside the Scarinish Light. It was much in demand as a whitewash and people were allowed to come down and fill up a bucket with the wet paste, which was diluted with water before being painted on the walls of their houses.

We are currently not sure how much the Scarinish lighthouse was working during the Second World War. Some lighthouses were, and some could be lit 'on request' by calls from passing boats. Skerryvore itself was bombed in July 1940, shattering a mantle and cracking two lantern glasses. (Bombing a pencil-thick lighthouse must be quite difficult). This suggests that the light was lit and was perceived by the Germans as an asset to British naval power. Work on the runways of RAF Tiree had only just begun at that stage. As the RAF base developed, a strict black-out was enforced on the island, with fines for householders 'showing a light' and even extending to shades on bicycle lamps. Jean McEwen does not remember her father not working at the lighthouse during the war years, but it seems likely that there would have been some restrictions on lighthouse operations.

Around 1950 John was succeeded as lightkeeper by Neil MacNeill, Niall an Tàilleir, 'Neil the tailor's son', who lived behind the Reading Room in Scarinish. Neil had a small hole bored in the back of the reflector so that he could see from his back door if the light was working. Although acetylene was a cleaner fuel than paraffin, the glass and reflector still had to be polished, and Sunday was Neil's 'cleaning day'. Carbide granules fizz spectacularly when in contact with water, and some schoolboys, hanging around the lighthouse, would put a handful in their pockets when Neil was looking the other way. The next day at school they would drop it into a neighbour's inkwell and watch the blue foam cascade over their desk!

There was also a lighthouse hut down from the headland in a sheltered spot by *An Cidhe Beag*, 'the small pier' where the Regatta Club hut is today. This was used for storing paint, drums of carbide granules and cleaning materials. The lighthouse boat *MV Hesperus* called from Oban every May with fresh supplies. Neil's wife Cathie got use of the leftovers and remembers how good the paint ('Brunswick Green') was and how thick the lighthouse towels were. She also asked her husband to bring up a small piece of NLB soda soap if there she had a particularly stubborn bit of laundry to clean.

In August 1956 Scarinish saw a real shipwreck when the small steamlighter 'Lady Isle' with a cargo of coal ran aground under the nose of the lighthouse while entering the harbour. There were no casualties, but the boat was badly holed and she was eventually abandoned.

In 1962 David A Stevenson's lighthouse was sadly demolished, and the modern lighthouse building took its place. The attractive 'lighthouse' shape was replaced by a functional, squat concrete hut, in work supervised by NLB engineer Mr McCurrach. Parts of the original lighthouse were salvaged by Neil and still form part of the family's garden sheds. If she was out, postman Duncan MacInnes would tell Cathie, "I've left the letters in the lighthouse!" The two carbide generators were replaced by an electric light and mechanism, powered by the mains and a bank of batteries. The light's range fell to 12 miles and it was re-classified as a Minor Light. Duncan Cameron from Scarinish Post Office replaced Neil as the lightkeeper, but eventually Scarinish Light became automatic, and almost a century of employment was over.



*The wreck of the 'Lady Isle' off Scarinish in 1956.
(R MacCrory)*

FUADACH BHAIL' A' PHUILL

Does your family have a memory of this story?

Do you have an ancestor or a sideways relative, who was part of the Balephuill fishing fleet devastated by the murderous gale of 7 July 1856? Would you like to help commemorate the 160th anniversary of *Fuadach Bhail' a' Phuill* during *A' Bhuain* 2016, Tiree's homecoming week in eighteen months time?

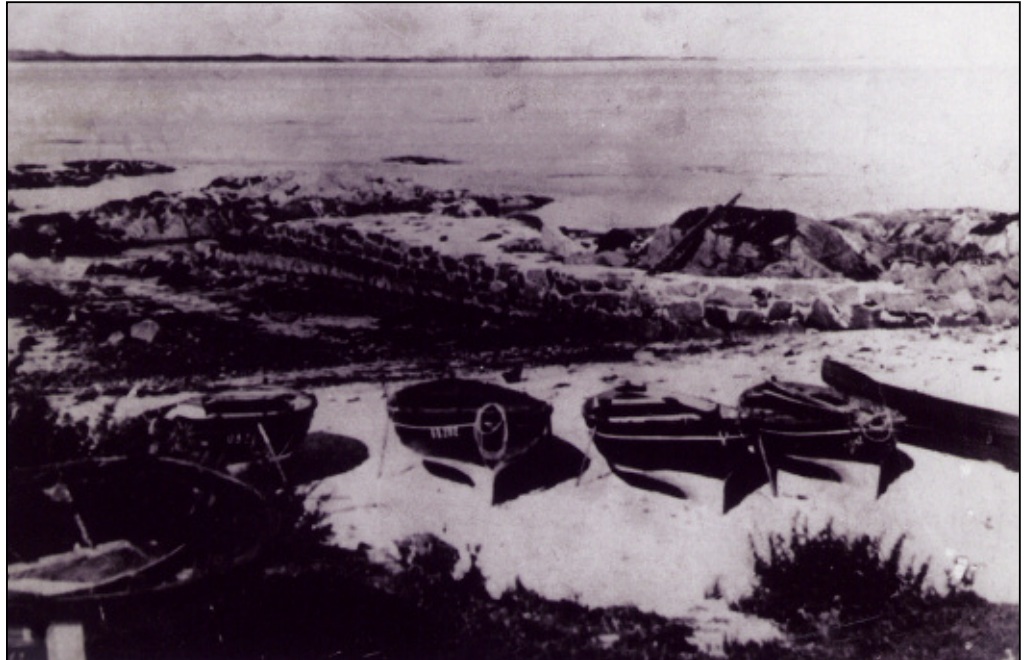
If your answer is 'yes' you can participate in three ways. Please come to Tiree yourself from 23-27 May 2016 if you can. All families with a connection to this event are also welcome to bring or send a small stone from where you live. They will be incorporated into a memorial commemorating the Balephuill tragedy. And the Homecoming Genealogy Team invites every family to submit descendancy information and memories about this event (see below). Submissions will be edited for inclusion in a souvenir booklet containing genealogy information, collected memories and photographs.

If what I'm about to say sounds familiar, please ask other family members if they remember your family's passed-down version of the story.

In Eric Cregeen's *Recollections of an Argyllshire Drover* Donald Sinclair tells this version of the story: '*Archibald* [Archibald Campbell, Am Bòidheach, 1834 - after 1901], my grandmother's brother, he was a fisherman.... And when he rose in the morning, it was a lovely morning... His father [Malcolm Campbell,

1802 – 1868] had got up too, along with him. His father said to him, 'You are not going fishing today.' 'Why?' said he, 'It's a fine day today.' 'Yes, it's a fine day at the moment, but it won't be like that', said he, 'before evening. Did you see the fadadh [rainbow fragment traditionally believed to be a sign of bad weather] he said, 'in the north-west?' After noon the wind shifted to the north-west – a storm – and his father said to Archibald, 'What do you think of the weather now?' said he.' 'Aren't you lucky... to be on dry land', said he, 'and not out there between here and the Skerryvore? If you were, you wouldn't come back.'

Port an Tobair, Balemartine in 1946. Boats (L-R): 'An Gaodach' (Lachie Dhomhnaill's), 'Taeping', 'Ariel', 'Heatherbell', 'Girl Pat' (Lachie MacArthur's father's), 'The Try Again'. (L MacArthur)



But six known boats did set out from Balephuill. The force of the storm drove one to Coll, two to Islay and sunk the rest. Nine men were drowned: John Campbell, brothers Niel and Hugh Kennedy, brothers Alexander and Colin MacDonald, Malcolm MacArthur, Hugh MacKinnon, Donald MacLean, and Archibald MacLean (*An Ciobair*).

At least 20 fishermen did survive: brothers Archibald and James Brown, Hugh MacArthur, John MacArthur, Alasdair Mòr MacDonald, James MacDonald, Farquhar MacDonald, Malcolm Macdonald and his sons Alexander and Hector, Archibald Maclean (*Am Port*), the MacLean brothers of Manitoba House, and the merchant with three sons aboard Bàta Mharsanta.

My great-great-great-grandfather John Campbell, aged 62 (he was born in 1794), was the eldest victim. He and 32 year old Malcolm MacArthur were swept overboard together. As helmsman, John took the tiller, rudder still attached, overboard with him.

Alasdair Mòr MacDonald preserved the story in his song *Òran an Fhuadaich*. A few fragments, along with the melody, were preserved. Louise MacDougall has collaborated with Donald Meek and Dr John Holliday to pull these pieces together into a new song that will be presented at the commemoration at A' Bhuain 2016.

According to widely held beliefs on the island, the wives of John Campbell (Mary Bell/McMillan) and Archibald MacLean (Isabella Black) were accused of witchcraft for creating the storm. Hector Kennedy, Heylipol, reported, "Neither of them had any great love for their husbands and they wanted to get rid of them." But both women had several young children to feed. One has to wonder why any woman in those circumstances would plan to rid her family of its main breadwinner?

Joan Rogers, a great-granddaughter of John and Mary Campbell, recalls her mother's fragment of the story. "Mary stood watching from shore during the storm, as John waved his cap to them, just as he sank beneath the waves." Part of this story is true – on 29 July 1856, *The Greenock Advertiser* reported, 'The perilous position of the men was seen by their wives and relatives on the shore, and the cries and prayers of the poor women were most distressing.'

After reading about the Balephuil tragedy Donald MacArthur contributed this memory about his great grandfather. "The bereaved widow was unable to nurture her baby and he was taken to a nurse mother, a neighbour next door, until weaned. [There was] no baby milk then." Thanks to Flo Straker's extensive Tiree genealogy research we know Donald's great-grandfather was Archibald MacArthur (1856-1933), the son of Malcolm MacArthur (who died) and Catherine Currie.

Does your family have any such snippets to share? Please send them to Sharon Clayton at balephuilcommemoration@gmail.com or post them on our Facebook Group *Tiree 2016 – Balephuil Commemoration*.

Sharon Clayton, Surrey, British Columbia, Canada

Louise MacDougall is helping Sharon and also working on projects to commemorate the 1846 emigrants' ship from Tiree to Canada; the election of Tiree man Malcolm MacLean as the first mayor of Vancouver; and the role of 'Donald the Pilot', also from Tiree, in the 1746 escape of Bonny Prince Charlie. Please contact Louise on tireecommemoration@gmail.com if you would like to help or have some additional information. Also look out for Ian Smith's account of the tragedy in *The Secret Island*, Tiree's not-secret history book available at all good sites.



*Tiree regatta in 1937 with the 'Taeping' on the left and the 'Katie' on the right.
(DA Brown)*

THE TIREE HONGS - part 2

Our archivist Janet Bowler writes that, following on from our article titled *The Hong of Tiree* in *Sil Eòlais* November 2011, An Iodhlann member John C McLean of Clydebank has been digging into the archives of the National Library of New Zealand. He has found out more on John Lamont who left Ruaig as a ship's carpenter in the 1820s:

'It would appear that not only did Lamont build the first dock in Hong Kong, he also designed and built the first ship to be launched from Hong Kong. In a letter dated 1847 from merchant seaman Archibald John McLean to his brother, the famous Sir Donald McLean of Kilmoluaig and New Zealand, he mentions meeting John Lamont in China.

'My Dear Brother,

Your kind and welcome letter dated Taranaki Oct'r 23rd/46 came to hand on the 18th. Just two days before my departure from Bombay home...[In 1842/3] I was appointed to supperintend [sic] the building of the first vessel built in China built by Mr John Lamont a native of Tyree and a most excellent man and great friend of mine. I named her Celestial...She was built for my late owners Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy of Bombay. I commanded her for some time. She was intended for an opium smugler [sic], not choosing that trade I resigned the command.'

Further research by John McLean discovered additional references. Articles posted on the website <http://industrialhistoryhk.org> by Hugh Farmer on 2nd and 11th April 2014 refer to a ship named the Celestial built by a 'carpenter...whose skill is well known'. An extract from the newspaper *Friend of China* on 9th February 1843 reads,

'On Tuesday last...a numerous assemblage of our friends attended at Messrs. Jardin, Matheson, and Co., Point, to witness the launch of the first vessel built on the island. She was named the Celestial, and is entirely of teak. Her model and construction do great credit to her designer, the late carpenter of the Fort William, whose skill is well known. Her measurement is about 80 tons, and she has been built, we are told, for the eminent Parsee, Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, of Bombay, to which port she proceeds forthwith.'

The *Fort William* appears to be another of Jeejeebhoy's ships, supporting the probability that the designer and builder of the Celestial, 'the late carpenter of the *Fort William*', was indeed John Lamont of Tiree.

Another extract, this time from the newspaper *The Indian Mail* of 1843, reports on the first voyage of the *Celestial* from Hong Kong to Bombay via Singapore.

'Shipping. Arrivals. Bombay, 31st March. Celestial from China 6th March, from Singapore 18th March'

Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy, 1st Baronet (1783–1859), was a Parsee-Indian merchant and philanthropist born in poverty in Bombay. He first visited China around 1799 and made three more journeys there. It is unclear why he chose to have the *Celestial* built in Hong Kong as there were dockyards in Bombay when the *Celestial* was built. Was it because he wanted John Lamont as designer and builder?"

TIREE AT REMEMBRANCE DAY IN OTTAWA, CANADA

An Iodhlann member Dr Garth Bray emailed to tell us that while he and his wife were placing their poppies on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the National War Memorial in Ottawa on the 11th of November, they came across a wreath from Tiree (pictured) amongst the hundreds placed there by government leaders, members of the diplomatic corps and various other groups during the Remembrance Day Ceremony. Garth was clearly surprised and delighted to make the discovery, as are we to hear of it.



CÀTH | CHAFF

- I have just completed a paper on the Viking place-names of Tìree called 'An Island in 170 Names: the Norse place-names of Tìree'. Place-names like *Sgaracleit*, *Circnis* and *Mithealum* are almost our only source of information about this period in the island's history. By 'reading between the lines' we can, to some extent, get a foggy picture of these Norwegian ancestors. This will be available shortly online at www.tireeplacenames.org. The paper is a bit technical at the moment, having been written for place-name scholars, but I plan to re-write and publish it in book form in the months (or years!) to come.
- Bob Chambers is also working on a publication called '*Land Settlement on Tìree and Coll*', which discusses the 'new' crofts created by the Congested Districts Board after 1897, for example in Hough, Heylipol and Hynish. I'll let you know when this will be available.

Thanks, as ever, for keeping *An Iodhlann* on the road, and thanks to Colin Woodcock of Blue Beyond for the artwork.

Dr John Holliday, November 2014