



## Newsletter of An Iodhlann's members

Welcome to another edition of *Sil Eòlais*. It has been a brilliantly busy summer, both with visitors to An Iodhlann itself, and in our wider projects. Thanks again to the wonderful team of volunteers who keep the museum open when the sun is shining.

### ARCHAEOLOGY

This year, Tìree has been unusually busy on the archaeological front. Our headline community excavation took place in September at *Cnoc an Fhoimheir* in Kirkapol. Led by Dr Heather James, a team of island trowellers worked for two weeks to excavate an oval mound and, having removed a huge capstone, the cist below. Early hopes that this might prove to be a Viking boat burial, one of only a handful in Scotland, were kept alive by the discovery of six smithy-wrought nails, fragments of a tarry substance (this was later identified as Stockholm tar) and even a piece of wood in the higher layers of the mound. As we got deeper into the sand, however, these disappeared, their place taken by a mixture of bone fragments and modern pottery. It looked as though there had been a twentieth-century bonfire of roofing timbers and household rubbish, and the ground had then been ploughed. The massive capstone the size of a kitchen table was lifted off, revealing a short cist made from four enormous single slabs. The capstone, and 'entrance' of the cist to the east, had been carefully sealed with yellow clay. The cist itself was filled with sand, but some large bone fragments, including the top half of a skull and both thighbones, were intact. The leg bones looked fairly average by today's standards (so not a giant), while the skull looked to be that of a man because of its thicker bone. The cist contents were wet-sieved later. Most of the teeth were recovered in this way and examined by Christian Verstraete, a Belgian dentist who lives in Milton. He felt that these were the teeth of an older person, possibly around fifty. The teeth were heavily abraded from an unprocessed diet, but only two teeth showed early decay. All the finds will be scientifically examined in Glasgow, and a full report should be published by the spring.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT - The Lunch Club visits the dig; Catriona Smyth, Dr John Holliday and Rhoda Meek hard at work; children digging another trench (and in the process finding several pieces of prehistoric pottery); children peer warily into the cist. Photographs Dr Heather James.

A group from the Association of Certificated Field Archaeologists made their third visit to the island in May. They have set themselves the task of drawing all the archaeology on Ben Hynish and in the Gott/Balephetrish/Vaul area – currently this stands at over 150 structures. Using a tape and offset method, this is a painstaking, but thorough, method of recording monuments. There is increasing evidence that Ben Hynish has a relict Bronze/Iron Age and medieval landscape.



LEFT - Janey Munro and Dr John Holliday take a break in a Ben Hynish shieling, which may be dug into a Bronze Age roundhouse. Photograph Dugie MacInnes. ABOVE - Cup marking on Dùn Mòr a' Chaolais. Photograph James McComas.

The North of Scotland Archaeological Society had a 'working holiday' on Tiree in August. One of their main projects at the moment is 'rock art', panels of cup markings. The group is being guided by Dr Tertia Barnett of Edinburgh University, an expert in the field. In just a few days, they found new panels on *Cnoc Bhiostadh* and *Cnoc mhic Ailein* in Kilmoluag, *Creagan Chadruim* in Balemartine and *Ceòsabh* in Balinoe, as well as confirming those on *Cnoc Fhoirneagal* in Cornaigbeg and *Dùn Mòr a' Chaolais*. These cup markings are likely to date from the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age (3,000-1,700 BC). It seems that Tiree is richly-endowed with this rock art.

Finally, Dr Darko Maričević from Reading University returned to the island to continue the geophysics research that had earned him a PhD a decade ago. He has noticed on new high-resolution aerial photographs a number of circular marks on the machair in Caolas, Vaul and Balevullin. To investigate whether these are markers of buried roundhouses or ditches, he measured the electrical resistance of the earth and its magnetic properties. It is too early for the full results, but he is confident that he has found a round structure or two under the grass at Balevullin. Since an Iron Age hut and Neolithic skeletons were found nearby in 1912, this is quite possible. Beyond the sixth tee of the golf course, he also found a cairn of stones, which seems to have been piled between medieval fields. This may originally have been a prehistoric roundhouse or a burial cairn.



Bella Trythall and Flora MacArthur, Moss, work on a resistivity grid laid out on the Balevullin machair.

## ARGYLL PAPERS

Alison Diamond, the Inveraray Castle archivist, paid her first visit to Tiree a few weeks ago to discuss the estate's document collection. Her team, which now includes two newly appointed archivists, Hannah Baker and Jen Young, has just started going through the huge bundles of papers. As well as rentals, or estate correspondence about ditching and fencing, there are many personal stories in the collection. One of these was found recently by John McLean, a volunteer working on the Tiree papers. The documents concern a single mother. Her family supported her initially, but were unable to continue after the birth of her second child. Her family and neighbours applied to the estate for permission to re-roof a ruined house in the township for the young family. After being refused help from the factor and the Parochial Board, the thirty-three-year-old woman herself finally wrote to the eighth Duke as her mother had been in his service. Under the Poor Law (Scotland) Act of 1845, parochial boards had been set up in each parish. Board members were usually the local 'middle class': in 1873, for example, the Tiree Parochial Board included John Geekie, the chamberlain, Rev John Gregorson Campbell, the Church of Scotland minister, and several prominent farmers, including Tom Barr, Lachlan MacQuarrie and Lachlan MacLean, Greenhill. Benefits could either be in the form of outdoor relief (money, food or clothing), or placement in a poorhouse. Every applicant was interviewed by the Inspector of the Poor; in 1890 this was Donald MacPhail of Kirkapoll. In 1891, twenty-six islanders were supported as 'paupers', but those who were able-bodied were rarely given 'aliment', or Poor Law relief.

### **Petition, 27 May 1890**

To His Grace the Duke of Argyll

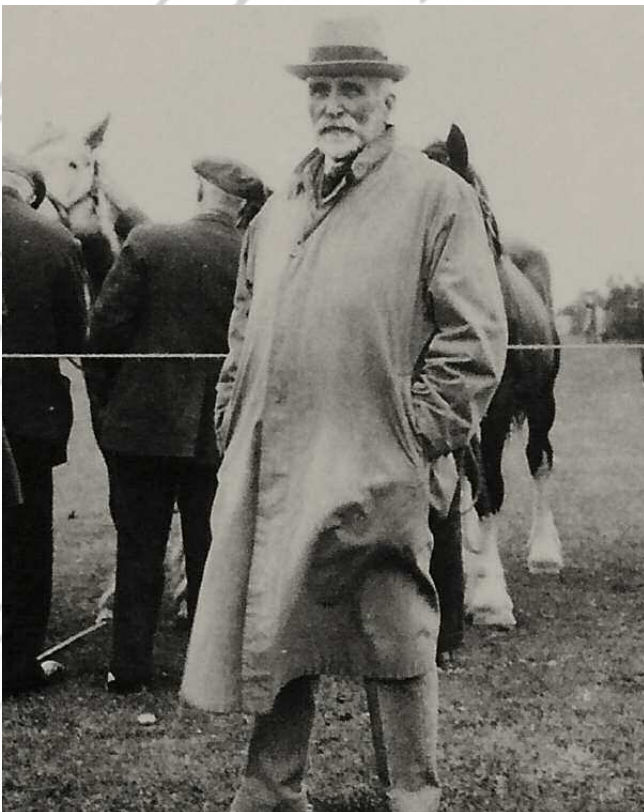
The Petition of Miss B in the Island of Tiree

Humbly sheweth: That she is now in a rather destitute condition, having been turned out of doors by her people; the reason being that she had been twice seduced by one named C ... To this C she bore two children, and the age of the eldest is nine years, while the age of the youngest is nine months. That her people are supporting this eldest child, and will not undertake to support the second child, but are quite willing to receive her back if she will send this youngest child to the Poor House, since his alleged father will have nothing to do with it. Furthermore that this C contributed nothing to the support of these two children, and that at the Oban Sheriff Court last April, Sheriff MacLachlan decided against him, and ordered him to provide for these children, which he has never done, being not in a position to do so, as the croft is in the possession of his mother. That the people of the township are quite willing to allow her to build a house, as well as to help her to build it, if Your Grace will be pleased to grant a site. That if Your Grace will refuse to grant a site, she will certainly have to become chargeable to the parish, or else to become a vagrant and to starve; for she is already in a destitute condition, having to take lodgings in various places, and not in to pay for her lodgings and bread. On the other hand if Your Grace will kindly grant a site, she will be enabled to carry on her trade, which is that of a weaver, and will thus earn an honest living. Thus she trusts Your Grace will kindly take all these things into consideration, knowing that if Your Grace act thus kindly, you will be the means of saving her from misery and ruin. And your petitioner will ever Pray,  
B.

**Letter from Hugh Macdiarmid,  
the island's factor in Island House**

This woman's case has already given me a great deal of trouble and I hardly know what to say about it. She has been at me often to do something for her, and she has been at the Par[ochial] Bo[ard] ever so often, but the Bo[ard] would have nothing of her. It appears that her mother, who is a widow, and the rest of the family will not allow her to return home as long as she keeps the last child, and I understand she won't part with the child. Her mother and brother were here yesterday wanting permission to roof an old ruin somewhere about for her – of course I could not do anything in the matter except to tell them that they daren't do anything of this kind as it was against the Crofters' Act. They told me that she was wandering about and that she was in a wretched state, and also that they understood she was making a hut in a sandbank. They also told me that they intended to petition the Duke to allow this old ruin to be roofed for her. The mother is an old servant of the Duke's, and she thinks the Duke will do something for her. Should they petition the Duke, I think the Duke's best plan is to send me a letter addressed to the mother and asking her to take her daughter home and use all means in her power to prosecute the father of the daughter's illegitimate children for aliment for the children. I could scarcely recommend the Duke to allow the [family] to roof the old ruin for a young woman like this; though if she sticks in the sandbank and the public get a hold of it perhaps something must be done. I think that in the meantime the Duke had better write a sharp letter to the mother.

I return the young woman's Petition.



The factor Hugh Macdiarmid at the annual Cattle Show in the grounds of Scarinish School.

These personal documents also throw up an immediate dilemma for a local archive, especially one serving a tight-knit community such as Tiree. While the story is a moving one, and helps us understand life on the island 120 years ago, we in An Iodhlann are very conscious of our duty of care for the present, as well as for the past. I have therefore removed the identifying details here, and we undertake to examine all documents that come to light during this project with this in mind.

The Inveraray archives have not, so far, revealed the Duke's response. But the 1901 Census shows B and her two sons living in their own house in her family's township, so it seems that the estate gave way in the end. Sadly, B died in 1903 at the age of forty-six.

## ARCHIVIST'S CHOICE

As a new series for *Sil Eòlais*, Janet Bowler, our Archive Manager, will pick her favourite accession from the last six months. She has chosen a collection of seventy-three glass lantern slides, several of which are hand-tinted, belonging to George Holleyman, FSA. The photographs were taken during his stay on the island during the Second World War. They were kindly given to An Iodhlann by George Holleyman's daughter Jill Scully, via Linda Gowans.



*Farmstead at Balevullin, Tìree.  
Note the whale vertebra.*

## NEWSPAPER CUTTINGS

Andrea MacArthur from Middleton, one of our volunteers, has begun the huge task of cataloguing our collection of over 2,000 newspaper cuttings about Tìree. These are full of big news items and personal stories. Here is a small selection from the first volume:



### **Emigration to Canada At Glasgow - for Quebec and Montreal**

The very fine, first-class, fast sailing ship *Charlotte*, 1000 tons burthen, Thomas Vasey, Commander, will be despatched positively on the 20th instant. This magnificent Ship has upwards of eight feet height between decks, and otherwise most spacious accommodation for passengers, and will carry an experienced surgeon. Water and Provisions as per Passengers' Act - tea, sugar and tobacco sold on board free of duty.

**J McSymon or Joseph Hutton,  
37 Union Street, Glasgow,  
4 June 1849**

*Neil Cameron (1824-1909) of Balevullin, who emigrated to Canada on the *Charlotte* in 1849 with his widowed mother, Flora MacFarlane Cameron. He later moved to Michigan and then Minnesota, where he took out American citizenship.*

An Act for Regulating the Carriage of Passengers in Merchant Vessels had been passed in 1842. It specified deck room of ten foot per passenger, a water ration of three quarts a day, seven pounds of bread, biscuit, flour or oatmeal twice a week, adequate lifeboats and a qualified doctor on board. However, a fortnight later, this notice appeared:

#### Notice to Emigrants

A scandalous and unfounded statement having appeared in the *Examiner* [a radical newspaper which employed Charles Dickens, amongst others] of last Saturday, relative to the emigration ships of the Clyde, which may damage that important traffic, and also create unnecessary alarm among the relatives of emigrants if left uncontradicted. To relieve the minds of those parties, notice is hereby given that the said STATEMENT is utterly FALSE and without the least foundation. The vessel alluded to (*The Charlotte*) is under the British flag, manned by British seamen, and commanded by a British master; she is only four years old, and for accommodation has a height of eight feet between decks; she was carefully surveyed by three professional gentlemen, appointed by the Government, and found perfectly sound and seaworthy; she was fumigated throughout previously to the passengers being embarked under the direction of a medical officer; and when she sailed had fully seventy days' water and provisions on board. Emigrants and others interested are cautioned against attending to false statements, advanced by "doctors" hired by Passenger-Brokers, for the purpose of drawing emigrants from one ship to another. They should apply for such information at this office, where they can ascertain the truth upon official authority.

**James A Forrest, RN, Her Majesty's Emigration Officer,  
Custom House, 20 June 1849**

#### Conviction for Illegal Trawling

In Tobermory Sheriff Court yesterday, Sheriff MacLachlan presiding, John Reader, shipmaster, 26 Strand Liverpool, in charge of the steam fishing vessel *Oceanic* of Grimsby, was charged with having on the 12th day of June used the method known as beam trawling in the Minch between the island of Tiree and Iona, about six and a half miles south-east from Hynish, Tiree, without said vessel being lettered or numbered on funnel. He pleaded guilty, and was fined £10 or fourteen days' imprisonment.

**The Scotsman 12 August 1896**

## SKIPINNIS, RUAIG, ISLE OF TIREE.

A DELIGHTFUL SPOT!

Facing South and overlooking beautiful Bay.

Golf. Bathing. Motor Boats and Cars for Hire.

Own Garden and Farm Produce.

Personal Attention. :: Moderate Inclusive Terms.

Mrs. FLORA MACDONALD.

A beam trawl was towed along the seabed, using a wooden spar to keep the net open. The first steam trawler was launched from Grimsby in 1881. These large trawlers were in competition with the Tiree line fishermen, as Ada Goodrich-Freer described in 1902: "Technically of course, the steam trawlers which sweep the bottom of the sea are not allowed to come within three miles of land, but in Tyree there is no one, owing to the absence of a harbour, or harbour arrangements and officials, to enforce the law, which is here, as elsewhere, evaded under cover of the night, and, moreover, the best spawning bank for the Tyree fishery is beyond the three mile limit."

#### Advertisement

Island of Tiree: Cottage, six rooms to let during summer; moderate terms. Miss Charlotte McLean, Ruaig.

**The Scotsman 22 April 1905**

This is the first advertisement known to me that offers a house for rent on Tiree. *Taigh Teàrlat Alasdair* had a shop attached. Charlotte, who would have been forty-three at the time of this advertisement, was blessed with a strong singing voice, and taught singing in Ruaig School. Because of this, she earned the nickname *Cailleach an 'Doh'*. The shop closed around 1938.

### **Salen fair**

#### **The Condition of West Highland Horse Stock**

This old-fashioned horse fair of the Western Islands was held last week in Mull, and the impressions of a south country horseman in regard to it, and the horse stock exhibited at the Mull and Morvern Agricultural Society's Show, held at Salen the day previous, may be of interest to your readers. When we arrived at the quaint little village on the Tuesday afternoon, and took our quarters in the comfortable hotel, horses of all descriptions were dotted all over the seashore from the pier to Glenards, a distance of about two miles.

On making inquiries, we were informed that these were Tiree horses in for the fair, and we decided to make a close inspection. On leaving the hotel, we came across one or two dealers – the early birds – who were busily engaged examining likely purchases, and the Tiree men were more or less languidly holding the end of a long rope which restrained their charges. They may not be lazy, but they certainly are apathetic. I discovered the advantage of the long rope was to enable the horse to graze as far as possible, and then, when necessary, the Tiree man put his foot on the rope, and the horse, when checked, turns and grazes in the opposite direction.

Now to the horses. They were almost entirely of a Clydesdale stamp, just showing in most instances the faintest trace of Island pony blood. There were some heavy vanners [draught horses for pulling shop vans], but a large proportion were inferior, non-descript Clydesdales, and a lot of them were far from sound. They were lean, too, showing they were grazed on land, which was evidently too poor to make a good job of them. One looked in vain for the good cob [a size between a pony and a horse] or Western isles pony for which this island was once so famous, and we were told they were still in the Uists, but that Mull and Tiree held them no more ... We met many dealers and sellers too in the evening, and each and all deplored that the horse stock was anything but what it was, and was yearly getting worse. They all admitted that the cause was the demand for heavy pit ponies up to 14.2 and vanners above that height, but they also admitted that these were nothing like as good as they were, because the pony mares from which they had been bred had disappeared.

***The Scotsman* 28 August 1908, page 8**



*John MacFadyen of Lochside, Barrapol, with a Clydesdale horse on the Gott pier in the 1950s. He may be going to Salen horse fair. Note the serviceman in the background.*

Trawling newspaper archives online has become easier in recent years. Our collection is large, but it's about a third of what there is out there. If anyone would like to help us collect cuttings about Tiree from the website <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk> in a methodical way, do get in touch.

## CÀTH

- Margaret Ann MacLennan has given us a beautiful wooden bench in memory of her mother and father, Mairi and Hector Campbell, Corrairigh. It will be a very popular spot when the sunny days come round again
- We are in the middle of repainting the outside of the building, and renovating the signs
- We are grateful to the Windfall Fund for a grant to purchase three display cabinets and three boards for the airport terminal. We will work on these over the winter, allowing us to display more of our still-expanding collection
- Past editions of *Sil Èòlais* are available on our website at: <http://www.aniodhlann.org.uk/members/>

It's been a fast, furious and fascinating year, so do stay in touch!  
Dr John Holliday

## WEBSITE LINKS

### ARCHAEOLOGY LINKS

[http://www.acfabaseline.info/images/Tiree\\_Horizons\\_Interim\\_Report.pdf](http://www.acfabaseline.info/images/Tiree_Horizons_Interim_Report.pdf)

<https://nosasblog.wordpress.com/2017/06/30/a-few-disconnected-thoughts-after-the-nosas-trip-to-tiree-june-2017/>

### ARCHIVIST'S CHOICE

<http://www.aniodhlann.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017.54.5.pdf>