



Newsletter of An Iodhlann's members

Welcome again to all the friends and supporters of An Iodhlann, Tiree's historical centre. We were pleased to meet many of you who were able to visit over the summer. However, we are only too aware of the "tyranny of distance" and understand that not all of you are able to come as often as you would like!

Summer in An Iodhlann

We have had another busy summer. We were lucky to have Iona Brown from Crossapol spending two months with us. We also recruited a number of new volunteers which allowed us to be open five full days a week. We counted 747 visitors during the summer and the Visitor's Book was full of compliments, such as "one of the best heritage museums – straightforward, interesting and very enjoyable." One highlight was Professor Mick Aston's visit in June. He is one of the presenters of Channel 4's Time Team programme and he wrote in the book "an excellent introduction to the island's history and archaeology."

Behind the Scenes

This autumn we take a look behind the scenes in An Iodhlann and highlight the work done by Janet Bowler, our archive manager:

"An Iodhlann," she writes, "receives many enquiries by telephone, email and in person, and being able to help highlights the global value of An Iodhlann, its ever-growing archive and its network of knowledgeable people. Here are two enquiries that had particularly happy outcomes.

"In June, I received a telephone call from Ilene Birkwood in the USA looking for information about the grave of a Dutch sailor whose body had washed ashore on Tiree during World War II. Ilene had been one of 300 children being evacuated on the ship *SS Volendam* when it was torpedoed off the west coast of Britain. She is writing a book about the experience and thought that the Dutch sailor may have been from that ship. I searched An Iodhlann's archive database for anything on the subject, and found that someone had indeed researched and written an account of the Dutch sailor's grave. The *SS Volendam* was a Dutch liner used during the war to convoy children to safety. In 1940, en route from Liverpool to Canada with several hundred children on board, it was struck by two torpedoes and damaged. The captain gave orders to abandon ship but the purser, 51 year old Rijk Baron, drowned leaving the ship and his body was washed up on Gunna, between Coll and Tiree. He is buried in Kirkapol graveyard. The account, 'Het Verhaal Van de Purser (The Purser's Story)', had been donated to the archive by the author and was the perfect answer to Ilene's query. Ilene was delighted. Four months later, and by complete coincidence, the author of the account, Desmond Fik, visited An Iodhlann and was happy to hear that his work was being put to good use. He gave me his contact details to pass on to Ilene and also offered to put her in touch with a fellow survivor of the attack. For more information see www.bbc.co.uk/ww2peopleswar/stories/36/a4296936.shtml



Bailemartine circa 1940. The arrow points to Jura Cottage.

"Then in July, I received the following email:

"Hello Folks, My name is Grahame and I am a retired Security Manager here in South Australia. I now do Community Service helping the elderly with their gardens etc. I have, as one of my clients, a beautiful woman (in her mid eighties) who was born and raised on [Tiree]. I think her maiden name might have been McLean she is now Mhari Munroe. Mhari has never been back to Tiree since she was married and moved to Australia. She has fond memories of her Grandfathers cottage ("Jura Cottage") and I would like to surprise her with some old photographs if available. My wife and I look forward to visiting her on a monthly basis as she tells some wonderful stories about her childhood days on the Island. If the information is not sufficient, then I'm sure I can get more without letting on with what I am doing. Hope you can help."

A few emails later, and various conversations with An Iodhlann committee members and volunteers, we discovered that Mhari's grandfather was Donald Spence MacLean who had lived in Balemartine, and had been known locally as Donald Dhiùrach (meaning "person from Jura"), after the house that he had lived in. Unfortunately, the house is now a ruin, and while I was happy to take a photograph of it for Grahame, I was concerned that it might upset Mhari. Happily though, one of An Iodhlann's volunteers and resident of Balemartine, John Fletcher, produced an old photograph showing the cottage when it was still inhabited around 1940. I scanned the photograph onto the computer, edited it to highlight Jura Cottage and emailed it to Grahame. Grahame was "over the moon" and so too was Mhari who "would have been bawling her eyes out" if Grahame hadn't been there."

Recent Accessions

This summer the RCAHMS published some of the photographs of Erskine Beveridge in a lovely book called *Wanderings with a Camera in Scotland*. Readers may remember that Beveridge wrote an important book in 1903 about the archaeology of the islands, *Coll and Tiree*, which was republished by Birlinn in 2000. This new book contains six pictures of Tiree, including an interesting thatched house in Scarinish. This had no front windows and was known locally as *Taigh a' Charbhanaich* – the house of the bream [fish], the owner's nickname.

A fascinating leaflet from 1939 was enclosed in the Balemartine Schools Register which we recently acquired. Entitled *War Emergency – Information and Instructions*, it includes the following information: "Pay no attention to rumours. Official news will be given in the papers and over the wireless. Listen carefully and have a pencil and paper ready... A label should be sewn onto the inside of children's clothes... If poison gas has been used you will be warned by means of hand rattles... Clear the top floor of all inflammable materials... have some water ready in buckets... you may be able to smother a small bomb with sand or dry earth... All cinemas, theatres, dance halls and places of public entertainment will be closed until further notice... Do not travel unnecessarily. The railway and road passenger services will be busily engaged in the evacuation of children from the large towns and with the mobilisation and troop movements... Do not use the telephone except for very urgent messages... All windows must be screened with curtains, blankets or brown paper fixed to the glass."



Balemartine School in 1945. Many of the children in the photograph had come from Glasgow during the war.

We have recently accessioned a small notebook from Barrapol dated to 1903. At that time the upkeep of the graveyards on Tiree was done by public subscription and every township had a collector. In 1903 the expected contribution from each household was 6 old pennies. In 1918 it was raised to 1 shilling. A note from the collector in 1944 says that "owing to the present circumstances the Annual Contribution must not be less than 3 shillings." In 1945 he pleaded for "contributions to be as liberal as possible."

An undated slip towards the end of the notebook reads, "Argyll County Council have failed to keep the graveyard in a state of cleanliness as it has been in the past, the Committee of Management have agreed to take over the graveyard again and endeavour to keep it in a passable condition. They therefore are desirous of making House to House collection again, and trust this will meet with a generous response by the Public as it has met in the past." Signed John Brown, secretary. The book ends in 1953, presumably as the responsibility was passed back to the Council.

Peter Rackliff from Hampshire has sent us a very detailed analysis of the air crash in 1944 over Tiree when two Halifax aircraft collided over Tiree. The two planes were in the process of doing Air Tests. These are short flights to determine cloud heights before an operation. On this occasion the planes took off within a minute of each other. 18 minutes later in patchy cloud they collided and all 16 crew died. David McClounnan from Balephuill was shepherding on Ben Hynish at the time and described the scene. "They seemed to come so close to each other that they tipped wings. The next thing the two of them went up in flames and you could see the tyres burning and falling right to the ground. One of the engines fell at the pillar box at Island House." One of the pilots had only recently arrived at RAF Tiree and it may have been the first time the crew had flown together. The Inquiry apportioned no blame for the accident but recommended that only one plane at a time be allowed up for Air Tests in future.

Not a recent accession, but a good quote nevertheless passed on by Duncan Grant; "In the Poet's younger days [around 1800] the people of Tiree led merry lives, they did not trouble themselves with hard work; they had however plenty to eat and drink. The island was full of Distilleries, and whisky drinking was carried on to a very great extent. There were capital dancers in the place and certainly these men did not allow their legs to become stiff through want of exercise upon the floor...The people of Tiree at the time of which we speak were moral, honest, hospitable and kind to one another; it must be confessed, however, that vital godliness was at a very low ebb among them." *Memoir of John MacLean in Clarsach na Coille* by Rev A MacLean Sinclair, Alex MacLaren, Second Edition 1928.

Website

We are still proof reading and correcting the list of families from the Old Parish Registers but we hope to have them on the site soon. We are also working to put our collection of 3,200 place names onto the site. Many of these are house and croft names which contain information about people. For example, the name Croit Nèill mac Ghilleasbuig 'ic Dhòmhnaiill tells us that this croft in Cornaigbeg was known in the 1930s as belonging to Neil, the son of Archibald, the son of Donald. This may help some of you family researchers! This part of the site should be ready by next summer.

Mystery Object

We think we have finally solved the function of the mystery object from Sil Eòlais number 18. A visitor from Mull identified it as a hem lifter used by women with long dresses who had to go out into the mud. Thanks for all your suggestions which included something to quieten horses and a parafin lamp wick adjuster!

And thank you again for your membership and support, which is really appreciated by those of us trying to put this fascinating jigsaw puzzle together.

Dr John Holliday, chair, An Iodhlann