

Tiree to celebrate one of its famous seafaring sons

All island's past and present seamen to be honoured



Against all odds, Captain Donald MacKinnon of the tea clipper *Taeping* won the Tea Race from Foo Chow, China, to London in 1866.

THE LIFE and times of one of Tiree's most famous seafarers, Captain Donald MacKinnon, will be celebrated next month – with some of his descendants serving tea.

Island museum An Iodhlann will on May 12-13 honour the memory of the former captain of the famous tea clipper *Taeping* who led his crew to win the prestigious Tea Race from Foo Chow, China, to London in 1866.

Captain MacKinnon, of Heanish, was not expected to win the race, up against the faster ship *Ariel*.

However, he managed to cover the 16,000 miles 20 minutes quicker than his rival – with many a newspaper at the time running the headline 'The better ship lost but the better captain won!'

So close was the finish, that a bonus of £100 was shared between the two captains.

The weekend starts on Saturday at the island's hall, An Talla, for a lecture on the life of one of Tiree's most famous sons. It is hoped Chinese leaf tea will be served by descendants of Captain MacKinnon.

Sunday will see a joint Church of Scotland and Baptist Minister's Service to honour all Tiree's past and present seamen at the parish church in Kirkapol.

Visits will also be arranged to take participants to the small bay in Heanish where Captain

Donald MacKinnon would have first learned to sail, the site of his family's home nearby and the crannog – a portion of land which was apparently gifted to him and his family for his success in winning the Great Tea Race of 1866 by the then Duke of Argyll.

Organiser Mary MacLean said: 'It is a great story and we have been thinking about writing a book on the captain. He had a very short life, died at the age of 39 – less than five months after he won the race.'

'We will be visiting our museum and a few other local points of interest and hope to wrap up the weekend event with an evening meal at the Scarinish Hotel.'

'It is shaping up to be a very interesting evening and we hope you can join us at An Talla on May 12.' For more information, contact An Iodhlann on 01879 220793 or email aniodhlann@tireebroadband.com.

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