

## THE HISTORY OF TIREE IN 100 OBJECTS - no. 69

### PEWTER TANKARD

This history business is often fascinating and frustrating at the same time, like a book you can't put down with lots of pages missing. This tankard is a bit like that. It tells us so much, and yet the man to whom it was dedicated remains (so far) elusive.

It's a pewter tankard, inscribed "10th LRV Sports 1884 Tug-o-War won by N. McIntyre". It was very kindly given to An Iodhlann by Sheila Naismith Ramsay from Canada, who had herself been given it by someone who found it on one of the island's beaches. Sheila wondered if the Neil McIntyre might have been her great-great-great-great-grandfather's brother from Balevullin, born around 1840.

This mysterious object has long interested me: what did LRV mean, and who was N MacIntyre? LRV was the Lanarkshire Rifle Volunteers, formed in 1880. The Volunteer Force was set up in 1859, after the Crimean War had exposed the sheer lack of numbers in a British army that was stretched to breaking point guarding the Empire. It was decided to recruit volunteers under the command of the counties' Lord Lieutenants. Twenty-four days training would be rewarded with twenty shillings pay. The rifle, at any rate at first, you had to provide yourself. On a surge of patriotism, a quarter of a million signed up, including in Glasgow, where many men from the islands joined the force. In fact, the Volunteer Force did not see active service until 1899 in the Second Boer War in South Africa. In 1908, the Volunteer Force came under the command of the regular army to form the Territorial Force, the precursor of what we know today as the TA.

Tug-of-war has a long history going back to the days of the Ancient Greeks and Egyptians. The Vikings had their own version, where combatants sat opposite each other on the ground, soles pressed together, and pulled on a loop of rope. Tug-of-war became a regular contest amongst sailors in the British Navy and soldiers in the army, providing a test of strength, technique and teamwork, and it later spread to the Victorian revival of the Highland Games circuit. There was a said to have been a famous tug-of-war in 1886 between a team from the marines tackling the Greenhill land raid and one from the island, ending with a famous victory for Tiree. Technique is important, but weight plays a large part, and, to even things up, teams are divided into divisions of different weights. Today, the rules have been formalised with teams of eight plus their coach, the rope slung under the arms and elbows kept higher than the knees. Tug-of-war was even an Olympic sport between 1900 and 1920.

In 1961, Kathleen Leith from Stromness, Orkney, remembered an unusual form of tug-of-war: "The boat was an old boat, any old boat; it wasn't seaworthy. About 1938 was the last time that they did it. They took the boat to the centre of the town [Stromness] and the people from the south end and the people from the north end took an end each and they pulled it. And whichever end of the town won, they tarred it and set fire to the boat. The tree was the same idea. They didn't have a boat. They put a rope on each end and the south end and the north end again pulled. They knew that the person wanted rid of the tree before they cut it down, but they had to take the tree, supposed to be without their knowledge and over a wall, and put it where the game was to start from. The name of the tree was the 'Yule Log'."

But who was N McIntyre? I have not been able to satisfactorily answer that question. A likely candidate seems to be listed in the Glasgow 1881 Census. This Neil MacIntyre lived in Centre Street, Tradeston, on the south bank of the Clyde, opposite the Broomilaw. Neil was twenty-eight, single, and a carter to trade. He had been born on Tiree and was lodging with a Tiree family, Alexander MacDonald, a ship watchman and his wife Flora. Two other boarders from Tiree were also lodging in the same household. Neil was part of that huge emigration from Tiree to Glasgow, one of the world's fastest growing cities at that point whose population then was nearing half a million. If any readers can solve this riddle, do get in touch.

And why was this tankard found on a beach in 1980? The central Council Gott dump was opened in the 1960s, at the time Robert Beck was on the Tiree Council for Social Services. Before that, townships usually had their own dump amongst the dunes at the shore, a place where household and crofting rubbish was tipped. Several of these can still be seen. This tankard is likely to have been taken to one such township dump. Shifting sands did the rest.

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