



Newsletter of An Iodhlann's members

Welcome to another edition of *Sil Eòlais*. It has been a fascinating winter, with a new book about a daughter of the eighth Duke of Argyll, more documents from the archives of Inveraray, and the possible last resting place of the clipper *Taeping*.

Lady Frances Balfour

Lady Frances Balfour was an important figure in the movement for women's suffrage. Her role has been, up to now, little recognised, but a biography by Joan Huffman published last month looks set to change that.

Frances Campbell was born in 1858, the tenth of twelve children of the eighth Duke of Argyll. At an early age, Frances developed hip trouble and walked with a stick. Her father was a strong supporter of the Liberal government under Gladstone, and served as Postmaster-General and Secretary of State for India. As such, he often spoke in the House of Lords, and the Prime Minister was a frequent visitor for dinner. As one of the few aristocrats fighting for suffrage, Frances' political connections played an important role in the struggle that culminated in the 1918 Representation of the People Act. This gave votes for the first time to the 40% of women who owned property.

At the age of twenty-one, Frances married Eustace Balfour, a young architect. Well connected, he was the nephew of the Conservative Prime Minister, the Marquis of Salisbury, and the brother of Arthur Balfour, another future Conservative prime minister. The couple disagreed politically. Ernest stayed true to his establishment roots, becoming aide-de-camp to King Edward VII. Frances, strong-willed, and an able public speaker and writer, threw herself passionately into a number of political causes. She cut her political teeth on the national executive of the Liberal Unionist Women's Association. She became a fervent supporter of women's suffrage, writing: *"I don't remember any date, in which I was not a passive believer in the rights of women to be recognised as full citizens in this country."* She joined the Liberal Women's Suffrage Society, and in 1896 she became the president of the Central Committee of the National Society for Women's Suffrage. In one three-month period, she spoke at sixty meetings. As a constitutional suffragist, she was strongly opposed to the direct action of the suffragettes, with their arson attacks, cutting of public paintings and prison hunger strikes.



A march by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1908.

*Left to right:
Lady Frances Balfour, Millicent Fawcett, Ethel Snowden.
© Getty Gallery, London*

She had several other interests. She was a member of 1909 Royal Commission on Divorce that recommended making divorce easier. She petitioned the Church of Scotland to support the ordination of women, and was frustrated by being unable to speak, as a woman, at its General Assembly. She was a member of the Travellers' Aid Society. This was an organisation established in London in 1885 to assist girls and women to travel respectably and chaste on trains and ships in Britain, and throughout the British Empire meeting single country girls when they travelled to cities like London.

Frances Balfour lived in Kensington, London. She visited Tiree less than her sister, Lady Victoria, but after the eighth Duke's death in 1900, and that of Victoria in 1910 and her husband in 1911, she came more frequently, staying at The Lodge on Gott Bay. She supported the building of the Gott Bay pier, the Agricultural Show and hosted the summer 'treats' for children at Island House.

Socially liberal, Frances remained otherwise true to her class interests. Her father had employed John Campbell of Ardmore as chamberlain on Tiree between 1847 and 1864. Known as *Am Bàillidh Dubh*, he had supervised almost two decades of estate re-modelling that saw the poorest quarter of the island's population emigrate, a limited programme of clearances, and argumentative tenants stripped of their land.

Frances Balfour died in 1931 aged seventy-three. Her passionate contribution to the cause of women's suffrage has, up to now, been overshadowed by others, partly because of her privileged social position and her commitment to playing by the rules. Later in life she became a regular visitor to Tiree, and her family has maintained its connection to the island.

Lady Frances: Frances Balfour, Aristocrat Suffragist by Joan Huffman, Matador

Written in the Landscape

Documents from the Inveraray Castle archive continue to arrive, helped by tireless work by the Tiree volunteers there, including Catriona Smyth and John and Jean McLean. At the end of the eighteenth century, the fifth Duke commissioned a blizzard of reports on the Improvement of Tiree. There is only space to give you a taste of these papers, but we now hold them in the archive. If you want your own copies for research, please contact Alison Diamond at archives@inveraray-castle.com:

In 1769, there is the first mention of building an inn in Scarinish: "*A proper public house should be erected for the accommodation of people going and coming from the island, and that a proper Improvement ought to be made upon this Harbour for the better accommodation of Shipping and reshipping of Cattle, Grain etc.*"

Observations by Major Campbell and Mr Burrell Concerning the Island of Terry 1769 (PFV/65/50; 6 pages)



Scarinish Hotel around 1910, from the Sturgeon collection, Coll.

A 1771 report drew attention to the islanders' lack of wheeled vehicles: *"The introduction of light carts into Tiry would be of infinite advantage to the Farmers, for which reason, after the new set [rental] has taken place, it would be advisable to send a Cart Wright and Black Smith to that Country, furnished with Ash for making ploughs, Carts and Harrows for the new tenants, which should be given them at the bare price of the workmanship."*

The same writer described serious erosion on The Reef, and, fascinatingly, the construction of turf shieling huts there: *"The Tenants of Kenovay have made Encroachments on the Reeff by closing in and adding to that Farm some Fields taken off it. They and others are in the Custom of digging the soil of the Reeff to build Shieil Houses on it, which gives occasion to a great deal of Sand Drift. There's a risk that the Western Sea will force its way to the Reeff unless sufficient Barricades are soon made to prevent future Encroachment."* *Remarks on the Island of Tiry 1771* [note by Eric Cregeen: the author is probably Alex. Campbell, chamberlain of Kintyre] (PFV/65/54; 24 pages)

Another report highlighted the tension between millers, who needed to flood land, and farmers, who wanted drainage. It also dates the building of the horizontal mill in Milton to 1785: *"The want of a proper miln is a misfortune ... There are now three sorts of miln in Tiry. One of them, only built last year to satisfy the complaints of the tenants. It has hitherto done very little good, tho' it much damaged Mr Archibald Campbell's farm, Ardeas. The water being stopped [dammed], the lake which he had drained had overflowed some of his hay and pasture ground, and carried off the manure led out for his potatoes, without the least Redress and will be an annual loss of £3 or £4. The lake which supplies the miln of Crossapol often overflows many acres of land, but is very easy to drain, would then be a great requisition of the farms Hilipol and Crossapol and would add to the health of 2-300 Inhabitants that immediately surround it."* *Observations Tirii 1786*, by the Minister McColl (PFV/65/62; 37 pages)

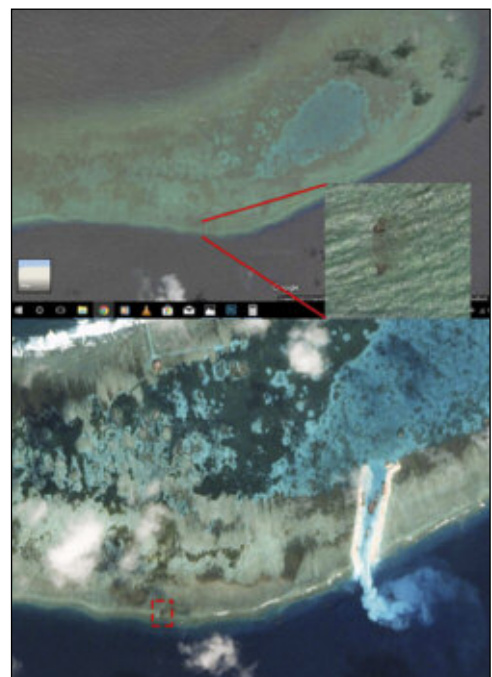
An undated report from the end of the nineteenth century explored the economics of building a pier in Gott Bay. Exports were estimated as: 500 pigs, 200 bags of wool, 200 bags of potatoes, 200 boxes of "shell and fresh fish", 40 kegs of butter, 150 tons of kelp, 150 tons of tangle char [from The Glassary factory in Middleton], "50 or 60,000 dozen eggs" and 5000 passengers". *Island of Tiree: Approximate estimate of pier dues which might be raised with the probable annual exports and imports* (PFV/65/89; 1 page)

Archivist's Choice

Thanks to many generous donors and hard-working researchers, we have a huge amount of material in the archive relating to one of Tiree's local heroes, Captain Donald MacKinnon of Heanish (1827-1867), who sailed his tea clipper *Taeping* to victory in the Great China Tea Race of 1866. Sadly, on his way back to China after the race, he died of injuries sustained while helping to save a stricken vessel, and was buried in Cape Town, South Africa. The exact location of his grave is still a mystery, but we may now know where his ship ended its days.

In January of this year, I was contacted by Malcolm Rodger, who had been researching his family history. He discovered that a relative, Captain Alexander Rodger, was a subsequent master of the *Taeping*, and that the clipper sank on Ladd Reef in the China Sea on its way to New York in 1871. Malcolm sent an image from Google Earth (coordinates 8.658867, 111.673423) of what he thinks could well be the vessel lying on its side on the reef, and asks: *"Could the Taeping still be there and that intact nearly 150 years later?"* I'd like to think so. What do you think?

Janet Bowler, Archive Manager



MacKinnon Bequest

On the same theme, the estate of the late Kenneth Mure QC, Heanish, recently donated three oil paintings to *An Iodhlann*, part of a legacy connected with Captain Donald MacKinnon. The first painting is a portrait, probably of the captain himself (although it could be of one of his brothers). This is stamped on the back: "*Lai-Sung, Portrait Painter Hong Kong*". Lai-Sung was active between 1850 and 1885, part of a local industry that painted wealthy ships' officers and their clippers. The second shows the *Demerara* (pictured right). This appears to have a Chinese dragon, a symbol of good fortune and control over the forces of nature, drawn onto the overlying varnish. This is highly unusual, but enquiries to the Scottish National Gallery and the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich have drawn a blank. The last painting features the *Taeping* itself.



This bequest is a useful reminder of the importance of *An Iodhlann* as a local museum. But it reminds us, too, of our responsibilities. All three paintings are badly in need of restoration to treat woodworm, stabilise the cupped and cracked paint and clear discoloured varnish. An estimate from conservators in Dundee shows that we need to spend £8,600 to safeguard these treasures. The search for this funding continues.

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Archaeology

Results from last autumn's dig at Kirkapol's *Cnoc an Fhoimheir*, organised by *An Iodhlann*, are now coming in. Under the massive capstone, there was a stone cist lined with impressive side stones, the gaps carefully sealed with clay. This is likely to have been a Late Bronze Age or Iron Age grave. Skeletal analysis showed that the bones represented one person, a male between 50 and 59, 5 feet 7 to 9 inches tall, well muscled and in good health. The teeth were also in good condition, although considerably worn by a coarse diet. Two bones are currently with the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre in East Kilbride for carbon dating and the teeth will undergo isotope analysis to give us an idea where the man grew up. Dr Heather James, the excavation director, has been strongly advised by experts in Edinburgh and Kilmartin that the skeleton is too valuable to be put back into the grave in Kirkapol, but should be stored carefully in a museum. It is highly likely that other archaeologists will want to do further testing on the remains in the future. A recent re-examination of a skeleton found in Balevullin in 1912 by Andrew Henderson Bishop found it to be from the Neolithic period, six thousand years ago, and be the oldest case of rickets ever found in Britain. The Kirkapol cist has now been filled with sand and its capstone replaced.



Excavating the cist. A femur (thigh bone) is visible. Left to right: archaeologist Peta Glew, Dr John Holliday, archaeology student Kate McConnell, and Catriona Smyth

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A dedicated group from the Association of Certificated Field Archaeologists have continued their survey on Ben Hynish. They have now found an astonishing 250 burial mounds, huts, roundhouses and animal pens on the hill's slopes. The site appears to be a deserted medieval farm, and may date back as far as the Bronze Age. Another group, the North of Scotland Archaeological Society, is returning soon to survey the growing collection of Neolithic rock art sites on Tiree, of which the Ringing Stone is the most fabulous example.

Dr Darko Maričević from the University of Reading returned to the island last autumn: *"Archaeological study of digital aerial imagery of the island led to a number of circular features suggestive of prehistoric settlement and monuments being identified in several locations, most notably at Caolas, Vault and Balevullin. Two areas around Vault Golf Course and an area in Balevullin were selected for geophysical survey in order to try to gain more information about these features, including whether they were indeed archaeological in origin. I was joined by Dr John Holliday, Flora MacArthur, Bella Bremner, Fiona Dix, Myra MacArthur and Dorothy Connor over several days in October 2017. The survey was challenging due to few unfortunate technical problems with the instruments, but the collected data was useful in confirming one of the targets at Vault as a probable ring ditch around a low mound, which has been much damaged by later cultivation. This in itself is of historical interest as there are several different cultivation patterns and regimes visible in the same area. They all apparently converge at the site of the mound, which may have been used as a reference point in the otherwise flat landscape. The evidence for ploughing in two different directions was also identified in the geophysical results from Balevullin. These were masking any possible earlier features, thus the aerial evidence in this case remains unresolved. The fieldwork was possible due to a grant from the Catherine Mackichan Trust and An Iodhlann."*

Researching Ancestral Connections and Heritage on Tiree: One Year On

Joanna Rodgers writes: *"My first research visit to Tiree was almost exactly a year ago. It was an exploratory trip to find out if the island would make an appropriate in-depth case study for my PhD project, which explores the relationship between ancestral tourism and heritage. Back then, invited to contribute to Sil Eòlais, I wrote about the generosity I had been greeted with and the 'indefinable atmosphere' of the island. Now I am back again, like so many others who return to Tiree after being beguiled by the place and its people on their first visit.*

I have been living on Tiree since March in order to gather further material as part of my PhD research. I aim to experience first-hand the way everyday life here changes as we move from the quieter winter/spring months into peak visitor season during the summer. I also want to broaden my understanding of what ancestral tourism means to visitors and to residents, and to engage with people who have all sorts of connections to the island. I have been getting involved in heritage projects, turning up at community meetings, enjoying the range of events organised by islanders and even occasionally helping out on a croft (although I'll admit I'm a fair-weather crofter). I've also distributed a survey for visitors who attended A' Bhuain and I will be interviewing some of the respondents by phone in May. Taken together, this all helps me to build up a rich picture of life here and the relationships between heritage, visitors and residents of the island.



As befits a PhD project at the mid-point of fieldwork, my findings can be summarised as follows: it's complicated (and extremely interesting). I'm hesitant to proclaim any conclusions at this point, as I'm still gathering information. I can say that some of the things that have struck me include the range of connections to Tìree from around the world, the depth of some people's attachment to the island, as well as the myriad ways in which residents and visitors perceive and engage with Tìree's heritage. It's a fascinating research project, which I'm finding tremendously enjoyable because of participants' generosity, enthusiasm and willingness to share their knowledge with me. If you attended A' Bhuain in either 2006 or 2016, or if you didn't make it to the Homecoming but have an ancestral connection to Tìree, I would be delighted to hear from you. I'm also happy to provide further details about the project to anyone who is interested. You can email me at joanna.rodgers@uhi.ac.uk."

Duncan Grant



There can't be many of you who haven't been helped by Duncan since we took our first tentative historical steps in 1996. Developing prodigious skills as a genealogist, he patiently created, in his corner of *An Iodhlann*, a treasure trove of family history. Sadly, Duncan has been finding it increasingly difficult to get into the archive, and has been working from home for the last year or two. While he has definitely not retired, Flo Straker has agreed to take over much of Duncan's detective agency. Flo, again as many of you will know, is an amazingly dedicated and knowledgeable researcher. Duncan is resolutely against any presentations or parties, but he can't stop me writing to thank him for his foundational service to the cause. *An Iodhlann*, as we know it, would not have happened without him.

The Boat Builders of Tìree

An Iodhlann has recently been given a number of tools from the workshop of the Vaul boat builders. These include some oakum (hemp or wool soaked in Stockholm tar) together with three caulking irons (*caladh*) and a large mallet, used to force the oakum between the planks to make a watertight seal; an adze for the rough shaping of wooden planks; several wooden block planes and spoke shaves; and a hand drill.

Until the sixteenth century, most boats were imported flat pack from Norway (a medieval version of IKEA) and assembled on Tìree. George Holleyman found, in the 1940s, a strip of bronze rivets on the island (*An Iodhlann* catalogue number 2000.91.20), tentatively ascribed by David Caldwell and Dr Colleen Batey to the Middle Ages. In 1802, Tìree's chamberlain, looking to develop the island's fishing industry, let a croft in Scarinish to a "boat carpenter". Hector Kennedy, talking to Eric Cregeen (on SA1970.102) had this story about boat building on Tìree in the 1860s:

There was an old boat builder down in Ardbeg [Cornaigbeg] ... [who] was building boats for the Duke of Argyll. And it was the Bàillidh Mòr [John Campbell, chamberlain from 1846 to 1864] that was speaking for the boat, looking after the boat, going down to see if the boat builder was nearly finished. And he got the boat. But first of all, there was some other Duke or well-to-do man. I heard the name but I cannot remember it. And he saw the wee boat fishing. When he went home to Inveraray, he asked him: 'Who built that boat for you?' And the Duke told him that he got it built in Tìree. 'I wonder if he'd build a boat for me.' 'Certainly he would.' 'I think,' he says, 'I'll go out to Tìree and see him about it.' And the Duke said to him: 'You'd better wrote to the factor, Mr Campbell.' 'I'd rather go myself and see. I would like to see the place.' So he came to Tìree, and he went down to the boat builder down in Cornaigbeg, and asked him if he'd build him a small boat. Neil said he would.

'When will it be finished?' He told him. He got it finished, and it was sent away. And the boat builder put in the account. And the Duke showed the man the price Neil [Neil MacLean is recorded as a boat builder in Corraigbeg in the 1861 Census] the boat builder charged for his own boat. And this man was going to get the same size ... And [when] this man got the account it was far cheaper than the one the Duke had ... It was the Bàillidh Mòr that was the middleman there. He paid the boat builder, but he took the money off the Duke. That's how he got the sack.



"Two men from Clachan, Corraig, creel-fishing off the north coast of Tìree, near the Ringing Stone. The photo was found in 'The Captain's House' in Corraigbeg, and is printed from hand-painted glass slide"

As more islanders took up commercial line fishing for cod and ling in the first half of the nineteenth century, the demand for suitable boats soared. The most common double-ended Tìree skiff was between 22 and 26 foot long, rigged with a dipping lug sail. These had to be light enough to be dragged up the beach to safety at the end of a day's fishing. A variety of boats were brought in second-hand from the east coast; many were also

made on the island. By 1841, there were seven boat builders on Tìree; in 1861, these were in Corraigbeg, Kenovay, Balevullin and Caolas. One site was at *Loch an Àir* between Milton and Ardeas, where the remains of the workshop and noust can still be seen.

One of the last professional boat builders on Tìree had their workshop in upper Vault. These were the family of Hugh MacKinnon, *Clann Eòghainn Ruaidh*, in particular his sons John (who died, aged seventy-three, in 1917) and Lachlan. The last boat they built was the *Joan*, commissioned by Captain MacArthur, Caolas, who provided the Pacific oak for the keel. This boat latterly belonged to the late Lachie MacArthur Mannal, and was a common sight at regattas until the 1990s.

Malcolm MacLean, *Calum Èite*, moved to Heanish from Loch Etive in 1935. His grandparents were said to have been had been cleared from their croft in Heanish and spent two weeks camped under a sail on the shore. His first boat was the *Ròs*, built in 1937 for the father of the late Archie MacKinnon, Corraigmore.

These tools, worn smooth by years of expert use, are beautiful to hold: a vivid link with the island's maritime history.

Bog Cotton

We recently received an enquiry from a masters student at London's Royal College of Art, about one of our accessions. This was given to us in 1997: a tablecloth said to have been made from bog cotton. *Eriophorum angustifolium*, is known in Gaelic as *canach an t-slèibhe*. In early summer, it is a common sight all over the island wherever the ground is wet and dark. Fibres from the white, fluffy seed heads of this sedge were used to make wicks for *crùisgeinean* 'oil lamps' and bedding, as Neil McEachern from Bruichcladdich on Islay remembered: "We were going to the moor in the month of July, and we were gathering the bog, it's like cotton, canach. And they were making pillows of it and children's beds." Bog cotton and sphagnum moss were also collected for wound dressings during the First and Second World Wars, and sent to be sterilised at the Edinburgh War Dressings Supply department, via the Oban depot of the Red Cross.



Christina MacKinnon at her spinning wheel in the 1920s.

But despite its name, the short, fragile fibres prove difficult to spin on their own. A tradition collected by Alexander Carmichael in the Hebrides in the nineteenth century set young women this seemingly magical and impossible task: "*Canach an t-slèibhe: no maiden could get a man of old till she had spun and wove and sewn with her own hands a shirt of the canach. This was the marriage test!*"

Bog cotton fibres can be spun if combined with other, longer, fibres like wool, linen or cotton. And to deepen the mystery, a photograph in our collection (on the previous page) shows Christina MacKinnon, from *Àird na Fuarain*, Barrapol, spinning in the 1920s. The accompanying note states that she was famed for spinning *canach an t-slèibhe*. A company in Finland, Kultaturve Oy, has started manufacturing fibres from the decayed stems of the plant found in peat cuttings, combining it with wool or true cotton. It will be interesting to see the results of student's this research.

New Book

James Petre from Mull is just putting the finishing touches to his latest book *Tiree and the Dukes of Argyll 1674-1922*, published by Shaun Tyas in August. Ten years ago, we lamented how few books had been written about the island; we are now in a much happier position. A search of *An Iodhlann's* library lists 250 books partly or solely about Tiree. Check out our website.

New Postcards

An Iodhlann is bringing out a set of postcards for the summer. The images come from a set of glass slides taken by George Holleyman, an archaeologist stationed to RAF Tiree in 1941. They are reproduced with gracious permission by his daughter, Jill Scully. They will be available on our website in the next month or two.



We are grateful to Margaret Ann MacMilan for the beautiful bench now outside *An Iodhlann*. This is in memory to her mother and father, Mairi and Hector Campbell, Corrairigh. Many of you will have fond memories of Mairi, who was a wonderful, and wonderfully knowledgeable, supporter of the museum.

Thanks for supporting *An Iodhlann*. It is an exciting time to be a Tiree historian!
Dr John Holliday