



Newsletter of An Iodhlann's members

Dear Member,

Welcome to another edition of our newsletter. Once again we have been hard at work over the winter mining the seams of planet Tìree!

Janet Bowler has been working as our Archive Manager since the beginning of the year and has made excellent progress in re-organising the collection and accessioning the backlog of donated items.

Shall we keep this?

In the past we have instinctively collected whatever we found interesting. Ten years and 12,000 accessions later, we are realising that we will be running out of room for new items before 2019. In response to this Janet has been instrumental in encouraging us to write a Collections Policy.

To see how we were doing, Janet audited our accessions from 2007. There were 322 items. 14 related to Coll and Gunna and so were outside our collecting area which is Tìree, Skerryvore and the surrounding waters. 44% were what we called 'proper' history, 7% oral history (islanders talking on tape), 19% 'people' history (family trees, and photographs of, or papers about, individuals), and 2% natural history. 13% were more general texts about Scotland or other islands, but 14% were what we have called 'future history'. These are things about present day Tìree that we are salting away for future historians – things like posters for shows or minutes of last week's Golf Club meeting. We realise that we are probably collecting too much of this and we have set up a committee to look through accessions before we accept them. Of course we could scan everything and keep all our collection on disc which would solve the space problem but we are still a bit old fashioned and quite like bits of paper!



Donald and Hector Campbell cutting hay at Corrairigh, Comaigbeg, in the 1940s
Donald is the father of Alastair Campbell - advisor to Tony Blair

The Story of the Sturdy

One of our prize accessions over the winter has been the minutes of the Board of Enquiry set up in 1940 after the Royal Navy destroyer HMS Sturdy was wrecked on the shore at Sandaig. We were put onto this by Lt Cmdr Mike Gibson, whose father was the chief engineer on the vessel and who was injured escaping from the wreck. He has done research in to the accident and raised money for a memorial to be erected at the site, now often known locally as 'Sturdy Beach'. I contacted the Records Office at Kew at obtained a complete copy of the enquiry and it tells a fascinating story. I wondered what had happened to the Captain, George Tyndale Cooper, but there seemed to be no further record of him. So I 'Googled' his name and found a book about life in a Japanese POW camp by a GT Cooper. Searching on the internet for the book, I was lucky enough to buy a signed copy which matched the signature in the Board of Enquiry correspondence, and I knew I had my man! In the book, 'Never Forget, Nor Forgive', there was a photograph of Cooper and a detailed biography. Recently I came across a reminiscence of the wreck by one of the crew with a less flattering picture of the captain. Possibly something for the autumn newsletter!

Western Approaches. **SECRET**

Date... 6th December, 1940. No..... 7021/W.595.

Subject.
LOSS OF H.M.S. "STURDY" - REPORT OF BOARD OF INQUIRY.

References.

Enclosures.

1. Flag Officer-in-Charge, Greenock's No.1495 of 28th November 1940. (See Schedule of Enclosures attached thereto).

MILITARY BRANCH
7 DEC 1940
ADMIRALTY

THE SECRETARY OF THE ADMIRALTY.
(Copy to:- Flag Officer-in-Charge, Greenock.)

Forwarded for the consideration of Their Lordships, concurring in the remarks of the Flag Officer-in-Charge, Greenock.

2. An error of judgment, involving the loss of his ship, must always be the responsibility of the Commanding Officer, and Lieutenant Commander Cooper, both in his report and in the frankness of his evidence before the Board, has not hesitated to give a full and clear picture of the circumstances leading up to this unfortunate occurrence, and the factors which governed his decisions at the time.

3. His actions during the harassing period after his ship had grounded until his crew were safely ashore showed him, however, to be capable of calm and sound judgment in an emergency, while the exemplary bearing of his ship's company throughout testified to his powers of leadership.

4. Although the loss of a destroyer now is a matter of great concern, I feel that the lessons learned from this experience will be of lasting benefit to Lieutenant Commander Cooper, and I would therefore commend for Their Lordships' favourable consideration lenient treatment on the findings of the Court, particularly in view of the last sentence of paragraph 2 of Flag Officer-in-Charge, Greenock's remarks. An Officer of this calibre can ill be spared in small ships at the present time.

John W. ...
ADMIRAL
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF

A page from the Report of the Board of Enquiry

Place names

Talking about 'Sturdy Beach' we have started work building a gazetteer of Tiree place names on a purpose-built database. Over 3,500 names have been collected over the last twenty years by An Iodhlann. This project is being supervised by Professor Donald Meek. We are starting by looking in detail at the Viking names, of which there are around 150 on the island. Ruaig, Cornaig and Sandaig all have the -vik ending meaning a bay; Scarinish, Heanish and Hynish all have the -nis ending meaning a promontory; and Diobadal and Mannal have the -dalr ending meaning field. It's a fascinating study, particularly because the Norse left very little else behind them on Tiree apart from their place names and we hope to build up a picture to tell us where they settled and how much of the landscape they took over from the Gaels who were there before them.

Parish Registers

Another project that has been building over the winter is one set up originally by Catriona MacLeod and Duncan Grant in 2005 with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The idea has been to enter on a database all the marriages, and the children from these families, on the Tiree Parish Registers between 1815 and 1854. We have also added any other social information we have in the archive. There are around 1,500 families now on this database. Once the project is finished at the end of June we will be cross-checking it and then we hope to put the details on our website. We hope this will be a useful resource for the genealogists amongst us.



Cornaigmore Post Office in the 1930s

Accessions

We have had some fascinating new accessions over the winter. One is a booklet called 'The Senator from Stromness', an account of the life of Lachlan McCallum by Jean Romagnoli. Lachlan was born in Tiree in 1823. His father died soon after and the family emigrated to Canada in 1842. By 1854 he had become a timber merchant near Dunnville, Ontario, and started building canals and tugs for the Great Lakes. By 1861 he was worth \$40,000 and employed twenty men. In 1865 he put his boat, the WT Robb at the service of the government forces against the Fenian rebels and was involved in the fighting. By 1871 he owned more than 2,000 acres, seven town lots for building, eleven dwellings, two warehouses and ten barns. The next year he built a splendid 15 room house with an oak staircase, heated by a private gas well he had drilled himself. In 1867 he had become an MP and in 1888 was appointed to the Senate. He died in 1903. An amazing story, which we have little room to do justice to. Copies can be obtained from the Dunnville District Heritage Association, PO Box 41, Dunnville, Ontario N1A 2X1.

Another accession contains copies of reports about the Boarding Out of children taken into care by Glasgow Corporation. The Children's Committee of the Parochial Board of the Glasgow City Parish had been handed responsibility for 'pauper children' by the Poor Law of 1845. It was decided that the children would be sent to rural areas as *"the country air would benefit their health and the thrifty habits of the cottars would help to reform their morals."* Third Statistical Account for Glasgow, 1958, p700. Many of these children came to live in Tiree. The rapid growth of Glasgow and the depression of the 1930s meant numbers climbed steeply and it was reported that in *"one northern parish 50% of the 67 children in the local school [possibly Ruaig or Balemartine] were Glasgow children."* In 1950 Glasgow had 1,628 children in this scheme. Foster parents were paid 17s 6d per week at that time, with clothing supplied by the Corporation's Central Store. However, by the 1950s it was realised that these children were often unable to find work when they left school in these country areas and ended up back in Glasgow again with no family to support them. *"Experience has shown that many of the children have had to be removed from their boarding out area because they could not be absorbed in industry in the locality."*

Annual Report of Glasgow Children's Department 1950, p.9.

There is some fascinating research waiting to be done here!

We are also looking forward to Darko Maricevic's PhD on the archaeology of Tiree which is due for completion this autumn.

Gene MacKinnon Memorial Project

'Friends of Tyree Gene-ology' is a memorial project in honour of Gene MacKinnon (1929-2009) of Guelph, Ontario. Gene and her husband Archie were well known faces on Tiree, and long time supporters of all things to do with the island for over fifty years.

This fund-raising project is international in nature. The co-ordinator is Louise MacDougall from British Columbia, Canada and the assistants and trustees are: Flo Straker from Dumbarton, Scotland; Barbara Humphrey from Minnesota, USA; Catriona Smyth from Edinburgh; and Michael Andreishyn from Vancouver, Canada. The funds will be donated to An Iodhlann's Genealogy Department in Gene's name and used to put information from the archive online.

An Iodhlann extends its condolences to Archie and the rest of the MacKinnon family and also expresses its gratitude to Louise and her fellow trustees for organizing this project. More information, as well as photos of Gene and Archie, may be seen at www.tireegathering.com - click on 'Gene MacKinnon Memorial Project'.



Donald MacKechnie and Alasdair MacDonald from Kilmoluag with horses Rosie and Polly in 1953



Alasdair MacDonald from Balephuill with a load of murrain grass in the 1950s

And finally, our mystery object from the January issue. We have had two suggestions. Ailig MacArthur from Heylipol and Northern Ireland emailed to tell us it was an instrument for clamping to the noses of animals to quieten them and it would have been used by Duncan MacLean, the first vet on the island. On the other hand, Steve Thomson, one of our committee members, found a very similar modern gadget for cleaning lenses. Maybe it was used for both functions. The debate will probably continue for a while yet!

Once again, thank you all for your continuing membership of An Iodhlann, which is a real source of funds for the museum and inspiration for those who work there. I never fail to be amazed by how much we still have to learn about Tiree. I was working in the building a few weeks ago on the history of schools on the island, when a charming couple came in and we fell talking. It turned out that one of them had written a thesis on the early corrugated iron buildings of Scotland, of which the Reading Room is a fine example. On his return to Skye Nick Thomson, an architect, sent me a copy of his work and we now know what a scissor truss is!

Dr John Holliday, chair, An Iodhlann