



Newsletter of An Iodhlann's members

Welcome to another edition of *Sil Eòlais*, the newsletter of *An Iodhlann*, Tiree's historical centre. We devote most of this issue to the life of Neil MacArthur from Milton.

'One of the Choicest Spirits'

by Dr John Holliday with Professor Donald Meek

A young man of remarkable faith, stoicism, 'gentleness and grace of spirit'. Neil MacArthur from Milton's *Port nan Spàinneach* died in an Edinburgh sanatorium bed at the age of twenty-three. Now, a recently rediscovered bundle of letters kept by his family has given us an insight into his life as he trained as a Baptist missionary in Edinburgh and his long illness.

His papers lay in a box which has sat on one of our store-room shelves for twenty-four years. Several times I have leafed through its contents, a fascinating miscellany of household items, including a large pile of handwritten Gaelic songs (which we hope to investigate in a separate project), swatches of cloth and advertisements for Lyons Golden Syrup. Below these lay, undisturbed, a bundle of tightly-folded letters.

Until this summer, when I unfolded, filed, read and transcribed the collection. There are more than fifty letters, written over the period 1925-1929. The earlier ones are written in ink at a desk; the later ones using a pencil as he lay in bed.

This is the story that unfolded: Neil's story.

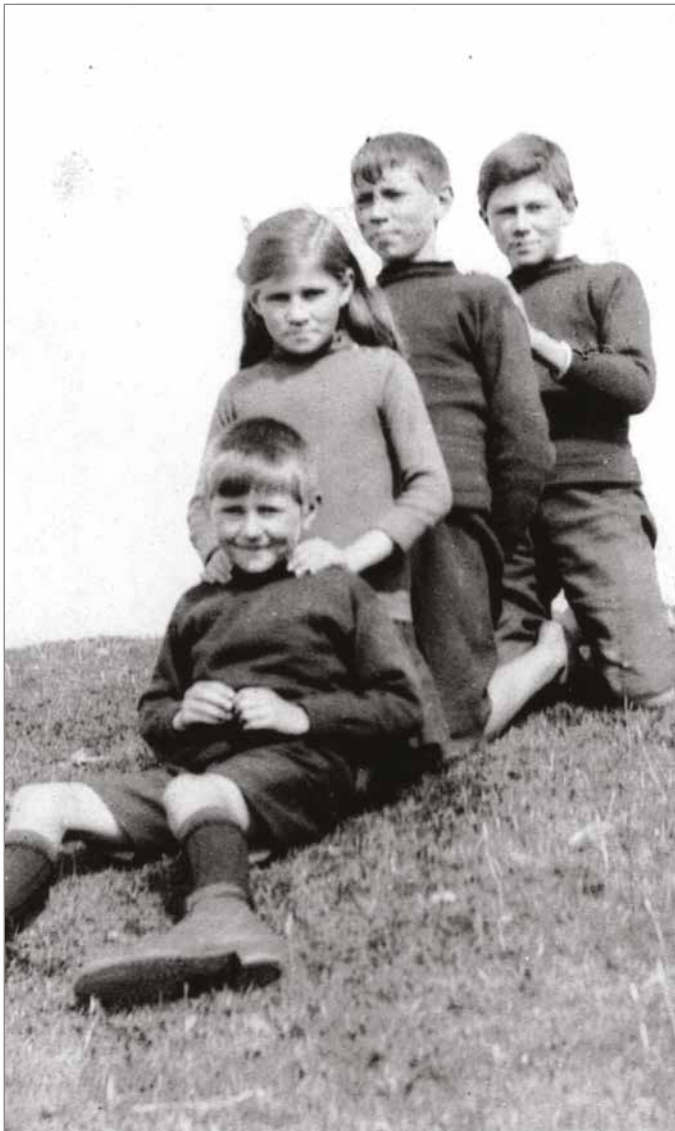
Neil Allan MacArthur was born at *Loch an Àir*, Caolas, on 20 January 1906. His mother was Isabella MacDonald, two of whose brothers became sea captains. Neil's father John was also deep sea, but came ashore to fish for lobsters as Neil was joined by his siblings Hugh Archie, Jessie Ann and Donald. When Neil was four, the family moved the short distance to a corrugated-iron house above *Port nan Spàinneach* in Milton. His father's mother Effie MacArthur lived next door until her death in 1928.



Ruaig Public School in 1912. Teacher Isabella Black is at the left, while the headmaster Mr Rankine stands at the right. Hugh Archie MacArthur is fifth from right, Hector Meek, seventh and Neil ninth in the middle row. The original Ruaig School burnt down in 1920.

Neil attended Ruaig Public School, where he made quite an impression. His teacher, Isabella Black from Vault, wrote to his mother: 'Neil [who was eight at the time] and Hugh Archie [a year younger] are very good boys, and quite unlike each other in every way. Neil is the cleverest boy I had since I came to Ruaig.' From his later achievements in Edinburgh, he appears to have received a remarkable education, bearing out what Ada Goodrich Freer had written a decade earlier: 'There is a saying among the people that "if Tyree does not grow trees, it grows ministers and deep sea captains."' He left school in 1920 when he was fourteen. From the detailed knowledge of fishing shown in his letters from Edinburgh, he is likely to have spent at least some of the next few years working alongside his father. In one of these, he gave this advice to Hugh Archie: 'I suppose you will be getting ready now for the fishing. Once it gets into April the time won't be long in coming. I think the creels were out before this time last year. I expect you will find it a little stiff to begin with, but once you get into it for a while, you will be all right, only you'll have to stick in very well and learn things first.'

By 1925 Neil found himself in very different circumstances. Cecil Shipley was the minister of Bristo Place Baptist Church in Edinburgh, the hub of the Home Missionary Society for Scotland. Shipley later explained the context: '[The] Committee of the Baptist Home Mission of Scotland found it difficult to supply Gaelic speaking missionaries for the arduous work of the Hebridean Churches. They, therefore, undertook the responsibility of providing a course of study for some young and devoted Baptists of the Islands. Of the five chosen who came to Edinburgh, Neil MacArthur was the youngest.'



The MacArthur children. Front to back: Donald, Jessie Ann, Hugh Archie and Neil.

The five students were Archibald MacDonald from Balephuil, eight years Neil's senior; Dugald Lamont and Neil MacArthur from Caolas; Neil Graham from Bunessan; and Edward Campbell from Islay. At least three of the five found lodgings with Mrs Jane Kennedy, who lived in the top floors of 39 Polwarth Gardens, a terrace house in Merchiston. Neil's comments that 'I am sleeping with Dugald, and have been so since we came' and 'I was lying so close to Archie' suggest that the young men were sharing the cramped attic space.

Mrs Kennedy looked after the young islanders well. Neil asked his mother: 'I think if you happen to have any eggs spare, you might send a few to the landlady. She is a widow with one boy at school! Another letter included the passage: 'Thanks very much for the cockerel you sent last week. We ate the fowl and enjoyed it and also some of the scones and oatcakes which were all very good and arrived in good condition, but we really didn't need it as we get plenty to eat. Last night she gave us a whole cake to eat after coming home from church. Don't send any more.' His mother, however, did continue to do his weekly laundry. Neil told her: 'I am sending off the clothes today. It is quite a big bundle and Calum will have plenty to do if he

is to be tracling [the Scots trauchle 'to drag'] two of them at a time.' (Their neighbour in Milton, Calum Lamont or *Calum na h-Acarsaid*, was the east end postman at the time.)

Their course was a new initiative, and the authorities appear to have been uncertain as to how long it needed to be. Neil Graham was sent to fill a vacancy in Colonsay after just one year. Perhaps because he was a bit younger, Neil wrote home: 'You were asking if we were to be clear of Edinburgh in March [1926]. Well, I don't know. They mentioned some time ago that there was a possibility of that, but so far we are not sure.' Neil described his classes, which seem to have been remarkably thorough: 'We are studying the lives of several great men, such as Knox, Wesley and Luther etc. and we have to give an essay on that at the end of the month as part of the examination. I am looking up the life of John Bunyan and it is very interesting. I like the work very much.' 'Our Gaelic teacher started on Saturday, and our teacher is a gentleman who in his boyhood and youth lived in Skye.' 'The big Public Library [possibly that at Morningside] is about one and a half miles away, and it's a nice walk going down their [sic] as often as we like. There are big rooms for private study, and we sit there and get the books and write down notes on what we read.' There were regular tests: 'We have finished the last of our exams this morning. We were down at the church from half past nine to dinner time, with Mr Waugh looking over us. [Percival Waugh was the Secretary of the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland.] We are glad to get it over as it means we won't have so much work for a while now.'

Neil made a good impression, as described by Shipley: 'His early education had necessarily been elementary, but he was athirst to learn and possessed remarkable powers of application and reception ... To these gifts were added a gentle grace of character that endeared him to whole circle of the church at Bristo Place.'

Besides his classes, there were opportunities to hear world-famous preachers visiting the capital. In 1925 Neil wrote: 'We are going down to hear Gipsy Smith this evening, or at least to try and hear him, as such a great crowd gathers to the place [Rodney Smith, 1860-1947, was a world-famous Romani evangelist]. Last night he preached in the Usher Hall which holds three thousand five hundred, and there were quite as many outside as were inside. They had to open another church and another man went to preach there. The meeting was to be at 8pm and they had to open the doors at half past six to let the people in. I hope it will be a great time of blessing in the city, as is expected by everybody.' And the following year he told his mother: 'I don't know if you remember hearing me speak about Mr Scroggie when I was home in the summer [James Scroggie was a well-known itinerant evangelist], but he is having an Evangelistic Mission just now, and it does one good to hear him speak. There aren't very many men like him today. I was down hearing him last night, and it was one of the most appealing sermons that I have ever heard. He spoke on the parable of the sower and the soils, and it was really stirring to listen to him. After the sermon, he made an appeal to unconverted people, and there were ten or twelve who stood up in the midst of such a gathering. He was speaking in a big UF [United Free] church and it was absolutely packed. The people were sitting on the pulpit steps and standing in the passages. I regret that I cannot go to hear him every night.'

Part of his training involved community work with church groups and pulpit supply: 'I have now left the Sunday School at Morningside as they told me to go to Bristo to assist the superintendent there, who is not keeping very well.' 'I have to be away from Edinburgh this weekend. I was asked yesterday by Mr MacKenzie to go to Perth [Baptist Church] to take the services for Mr Grant Robinson, who is to go to Dundee. I am going tomorrow (Sat) evening and expect to be back on Monday morning, God willing. Last Sunday evening I had a service in a mission hall belonging to Charlotte Chapel [Shandwick Place]. 'I had another bit of luck yesterday. I had been asked some time ago to be ready to take the morning service on Sunday 16th Jan. [1927] for Mr Conway of Abbeyhill [Baptist Church, Elgin Terrace] as he was to be away himself. So yesterday I went down and took the service for him. We had a full church (they always have there) and a good service where I felt the Lord's help and presence. After the service, I was presented with £1 1/- (a guinea) from the deacons. Very good of them, wasn't it?'

The young probationers were embraced by the Edinburgh Baptist community: 'We were out at tea last Sunday evening at a gentleman's house, where we got great kindness shown to us. There is to be a social in the church on Thursday, and a lady bought tickets for us as soon as they were to be had. And then another lady got them for us, not knowing that we had them before. Of course, she could get clear of them again, but it shows the kindness that is being shown to us. The Lord is supplying all our wants, and I have no doubt but that he will continue to do that.' And over Christmas 1926 he wrote to his mother: 'I gave the chicken to people who live just a very short distance from here. Very kind people they are. We are going with [them] for dinner tomorrow, and we are also going to spend New Year's day evening with them. They are Highland people. We had a very nice evening with Mr Shipley on Saturday, and had a typical English Christmas tea.'

R.S. 2. No. 451585
BRITISH MERCANTILE MARINE.
IDENTITY AND SERVICE CERTIFICATE.

W Glas 158148
Identity and Service Certificate.

Date of Birth 28 (Day) Sept (Month) 1866 (Year)
Place of Birth Tiree (Town) Scotland (Country)
Nationality Forthian
Nationality of Father _____
Height 5'8" Colour of Hair Dark Eyes Brown
Tattoo and other distinguishing marks: Anchor on left hand Britannia on rt arm

PHOTOGRAPH.
Official Stamp of Affixing Officer is to be impressed partly on photo and

LEFT THUMB PRINT.
Compulsory in the case of Asiatics, Africans and other coloured seamen.

No. of Discharge Book (if any) 26670.
National Health Insurance No. _____
Name and Address of Next of Kin Wife Mrs
Bella Mrs Waltham
Bankers Tiree
Address on National Registration Card _____
(if unregistered) Home Address _____
Signature John Neil
For use of the Ministry of National Service.
This Certificate is recognised as a valid protection from recruitment so long as the holder fulfils the conditions of his employment as a member of the Mercantile Marine.
Region _____
Regional No. _____
Signed _____ A.D.N.S. _____ Area _____
Date _____

If this Certificate is lost the finder is at once to place it in the nearest Pillar Box when it will be forwarded to—
The Registrar General of Shipping & Seamen,
Tower Hill,
London, E. 1.

The Merchant Navy Identity and Service Certificate of Neil's father, John.

Neil did not forget his family: 'You mentioned in some letter that MacDonald said father wouldn't get the Seamen's Pension, but I think you should inquire deeper into it if opportunity affords to do so.' 'Be sure and let me know always how many lobsters they get each day, as I am as keen to know as if I were at home, if not more so. I always picture them in my mind going about the rocks, and pray that they have every success.' 'Tell Donald [his younger brother] I congratulate him on killing his first hare.'

Travel home in winter was uncertain, even after the opening of the new Gott Bay pier: 'We expect to get a few days at Christmas, but I'm afraid it won't be worthwhile going home. The distance is long and the journey expensive, and one is never sure whether we'll get there or not, and then getting away again it's the same.' 'We are often together in spirit though absent in body. Isn't it a great gift of God?' With great foresight he wrote in 1926: 'The time will come when people will get back and forward [to Tiree] by aeroplane instead of train and steamer. I saw one crossing above the roofs of the houses just now.' It was to be ten years before the first passenger plane landed on The Reef's grass airstrip.

Neil appears to have been supported in Edinburgh by the Baptist Home Mission, but he was very conscious of the precarious family finances back home: 'It was very kind of UD ['Uncle Donald' was Captain Donald MacDonald, *Dòmhnall 'Illeasbaig a' Mhuilleir*, his mother's brother, who went on to build 'Milton House'] to send that £1 note [worth £70 today], but you shouldn't have sent it on to me at all, as I could do nicely without and I suppose you will be running pretty scarce now [at the end of the winter].' After he was admitted to the sanatorium, he was intensely frustrated that his chance of supporting his family had been thwarted: 'Of course, it gives me great joy to know that at home you are prepared for the winter and not pressed hard for anything; had it been otherwise, my state here would not be so bright. I thought I would have been earning something by this time and able to help a little. But instead of that, I am not able

to do anything for myself or anybody else.' While his calling was a matter of deep faith, he must also have hoped that a career in the Baptist ministry would have allowed him to support his family at home.



Captain Donald MacDonald, Neil's uncle, on board the Baron Polwarth. His daughter Ishbel (later Johnston) sits on his lap.

His letters also contain snippets of Tìree news: '17 January 1927 ... I got quite a surprise when I heard of the fate of the *Eriskaig* in Harbour [this herring drifter, more often remembered today as the *Eriskay*, belonged to Donald Archie MacDonald, Ruaig]; I didn't think she would finish up as near home as that. She must have gone pretty quickly once the fire started when it was 12 when people went to bed and the fire had gained such a hold of her at 2 o'clock that it was seen at such a distance.' 'I saw old Dr MacDonald's death in the *Oban Times* the other day. At least, I thought it would be the same man as we knew by the name of *An Dotair Domhnallach* [Dr Colin McDonald from Bunesan died in 1927; he had practised in Balemartine from 1909 to 1912].'

Not long after their arrival in Edinburgh, Neil and Archie had been laid low in their cramped attic space. Neil, characteristically, made light of it to his mother, who was naturally worried as the deadly 'Spanish Flu' pandemic was just a recent memory: 'You are worrying far too much about the cold that I had. I am as fresh as ever now, and don't feel any the worse of it ... It was the Flu that I had and really I was only bad about a day and a half, but the temperature was up a little so I was obliged to stay in bed. I was taking my food all the time I was in bed. I had to stay there a week and two days, but the last two days, as I told you, were only in case I should carry the infection of the measles through the house, as I was lying so close to Archie. I had nothing like you mentioned, such as Pneumonia ... The doctor sounded me when he came to see Archie, first in bed and then after getting up, and he said I was clear of any trouble ... He gave me a bottle of tonic, which I have finished; it was only to give a good appetite after leaving bed. I am eating my food as well as any of the rest, and I can assure you that's not too bad; if we don't eat the woman out of the house, it's a good job. I was going to get a bottle of emulsion as you said, and I went down to a class in the Church vestry the other evening (the class which the minister gives us on how to make sermons) and he asked if I was all right now, and I told him I was. He asked me if I could take emulsion, and I told him I could, and he opened a cupboard door and handed me out a bottle. I don't know if he had it there for the purpose or not. Of course, he just gave it to me as a gift, and I was glad to get it too, for it's certainly good after a cold or anything like that. Now I am getting tired of blethering about myself, and I am only telling you all this so that you won't worry more about it ... Archie [his fellow Tìree student] is rather far back, yet

of course I don't mean you to say that to anyone else. He is still in bed and has to remain so until the doctor comes again.' In the light of his later diagnosis, however, this 'flu' may have been the start of something more serious. Indeed, within months Archie had returned home to Tiree. Neil replied to his mother: 'I am sorry to understand that poor Archie is so far through; seemingly, there isn't much hope for him now. There certainly is none if his second lung is beginning. Well, I am very thankful to be in the very best of health and vigour.' Sadly, Archibald MacDonald died of tuberculosis in Balephuill in 1928.

Despite these assurances, Neil developed a tuberculous abscess at the base of his spine during the second year of his studies. He underwent an operation in March or April 1927, leaving him with a discharging sinus and chronic sciatic pain. Tuberculosis had become a notifiable disease, and Neil was admitted to Southfield Sanatorium in Liberton, to the south of the city. He reported to his mother: 'My leg was a little bit sore, but nothing to make it very uncomfortable. Dr [JC] Simpson [the Superintendent] had a look at the wound the other day and says it has improved much since he saw it last.'



Neil MacArthur in Edinburgh. He is wearing a Christian Endeavour badge.

The sanatorium movement had started in 1836 with the idea that tuberculosis was best treated by fresh country air, bed rest and a healthy diet. The idea was slow to catch on, but by the 1890s sanatoriums had become common throughout the world. Southfield House had been converted some two decades earlier. It also had a Colony or small farm, where recovering patients could work outside.

One of the sanatorium's doctors described the scene in the 1940s: 'In the grounds of Southfield Hospital itself there were chalets, two people in each chalet. And they were totally open. And they were there summer and winter. I have done ward rounds where the end of the bed, covered with a tarpaulin has been covered in snow.' Neil was cared for inside, but with windows wide open whatever the weather. He wrote in November 1927: 'It is extremely cold, a complete change from last week, which was quite warm although the winds were high. Everybody has their cardigan and gloves and so forth on now and

even at that, it sometimes isn't too warm. Of course, with the windows and everything open, it is almost like sleeping outside. I wear my white jersey and it is quite cosy. The plumbers also are putting in new heater pipes in the bathroom just now, so that there is no hot water during the day and Matron, at intervals, is busy filling hot water bottles from the urn in the kitchen ... The frost was the keenest I have ever seen; even some of my stout got frozen in the tumbler one day.' 'Now I am stopping this. One's fingers get like ice writing in this weather.' In summer they were taken outside: 'The weather has been fine and we were out on the veranda yesterday and today in the forenoon.' The patients were allowed up once a day to the toilet, but otherwise were instructed to lie still in bed, something that must often have been uncomfortable for Neil with his spinal abscess.

A fellow patient in Neil's ward was the medical student Christopher Clayson, taken ill as he sat his final exams. He later described the regime: 'Cod liver oil laced with *liquor arsenicalis* [an arsenic salt used in the treatment of tuberculosis] which [Simpson] regarded as a good tonic. Raw eggs, three a day. How my stomach stood up to it I don't know! Raw meat. He was very keen on raw meat. This was simply scraped steak, not minced. It separated the muscle tissue from the connective tissue. Oh! It was all right. Nothing wrong with it ... He used to prescribe half a pound twice a day. It was appalling! I only got two ounces, or something like that.'

Sugar was officially frowned on. Neil wrote to his mother: 'The tablet [similar to fudge] was very nice. There was just a piece for everyone in the ward, and Matron got a taste of it too ... However, don't send any more of it at any time. That sort of thing is quite a delicacy at home, but with us we get too many sweets, and the less we eat of them the better. The chief is very against sweets, and anything like that we have to hide when he comes round.'

Neil kept up a brave face to his family: 'I am keeping very well and am quite comfortable in every way.' He was more concerned for his family than himself: 'I am very pleased to know that you are well supplied with everything you need at home. Knowing that, I am quite happy and have no worry for the winter.'



Isabella MacDonald, Neil's mother, in front of her house at Port nan Spàinneach. This was probably taken after Neil's death. A tame monkey on a lead sits on her lap.

Jean Cassie was the sanatorium's long-serving Matron. Following a couple of visits to Edinburgh by Neil's mother, a friendship developed between the two. Jean wrote:

'As I am on holiday, I am writing as promised to tell you about Neil. I left him looking much the same as he was when you were with us. Shortly after you left, he complained of a pain in his stomach, so we had him X-rayed but there was nothing fresh showing. I really think perhaps it was more over parting with you once again. He was a wee bit dull after you had gone, but we all tried to interest him and brighten him up. If the pain had been anything really abdominal, he would have had sickness and diarrhoea, but he had neither. I got Dr Simpson to put him on Whisky twice daily, just a little without any water, after dinner and last thing at night. He was quite good about it, and I think it is awfully good and stimulating when necessary. I am missing all of my boys very much ... When I go back, Sister Govan is going to take Sister Thomson's place and she is awfully sweet. Neil likes her. I want you to do something for me. If lobsters are in season just now, I would like you to send me one on here as a special treat. Try to avoid the weekends. I hope you won't be annoyed by me asking. Send it parcel post, and when I get back to Southfield, I hope you'll send one on occasionally to Neil as he likes them, and I love to take the bother to

make it nice for him. The others fuss about it and think it is a lot of bother, but I like to let the boys have their home stuff; nothing to them tastes half so good.'

Neil had a regular flow of visitors: 'We are having quite a lot of entertainment about Christmas with people coming in to sing and that sort of thing. Most of it will be out in the hall, of course, but I don't mind much missing some of it, and, besides, one can hear fairly well in here. One lady is giving her night in this ward. She is bringing a conjurer who can do all sorts of things, so that will be quite nice. Reita was out today after dinner. Her father's chauffeur drove her out while he had some time at home for dinner, and he came in with her too. A very nice boy he seemed to be.' Another visitor made a less favourable impression: '[She] is very kind, but her endless inquisitiveness and forwardness stands against her.' This is Neil's only critical remark in the entire correspondence. Cecil Shipley wrote after Neil's death: 'We who had great hopes for his future ministry realise that these three bedridden years were themselves a ministry to the many who visited him. Here was more than resignation, here was a triumph of faith and patience.'

Vaul,
29th Dec. 1914.

My dear Mrs MacDonald,
It was really too kind of you to send me such a beautiful present; it is indeed lovely. I do not know how to thank you, but in the meantime please accept my kindest thanks. I am also very proud of Jessie Ann's nice present, and I shall value it very much for the sake of the sender. I often wonder what she is like, and if she resembles the one she is called after.

Neil and Hugh Archie are very good boys, and quite unlike each other in every way. Neil is the cleverest boy I had since I came to Kuaig. I was sorry I could not put Hugh Archie in a higher class when the others got new books, but he's getting on much better of late with his lessons, and I expect to have him along with the rest in February. I am always hearing about you from Neil, and I am glad that you are keeping so well this winter.

I must now conclude by wishing you all a very happy and prosperous New Year, and thanking you very much for your nice gifts.

I remain,
Yours sincerely,
Isabella Black.

Letter from Isabella Black, Neil's teacher, to his grandmother.

He had one particularly faithful visitor, as he told his mother: 'Miss Green was out for a while yesterday. She is very attentive coming out every week, and it isn't that she hasn't plenty to do otherwise. She is a very busy woman.' The two had met over Christmas 1926: 'Yesterday evening, we were out at Miss Green's (the Greek teacher) school, where we heard Christmas carols being sung by a choir of about two hundred girls. It was really fine. After that, we went along with her to tea, and spend most of the evening there.' Phyllis Leader Green was nineteen years older than Neil. The daughter of the Reverend Professor Samuel Walter Green, a Baptist minister and academic, she had come from London to teach in Edinburgh. Phyllis must have met Neil's mother during her visit to the sanatorium in October 1927, writing:

Dear Mrs MacArthur, I could not go out to Neil the week after you left, as I was not well myself, but I saw him yesterday and had a nice long visit. He seemed very cheerful and is evidently going on quite steadily. They have had it very cold out there, but have managed pretty well, he says, with hot water bottles and extra blankets. Neil has not needed his full allowance of blankets yet, so if the weather gets still colder, he will be all right. He had been wearing his white jersey while sitting up, but was lying down again when I went. He was going to have cold pork for supper – which does not sound very invalidish! I am glad you had a fairly good voyage home. It would have been tiresome to be stuck in Oban for ever so long. I hope you are all well at home.

In 1927 Neil wrote to his mother that, 'It looks as if we were going to get the wireless in at last, and we are all looking forward to it a bit. Some of the stuff came out yesterday and today the men have come to start work, but I don't know how long they will take to fix it up. It will make a big change, and when we have separate phones instead of a loud speaker, one can listen in as he pleases.' This was a year after the first radio on Tiree, a set belonging to the travelling salesman Peter MacNeill from Colonsay.

In April 1929 Neil wrote to his mother: 'I am doing not so bad, though I have a long way to go yet.' It is his last surviving letter. He died from kidney failure caused by tuberculosis in the sanatorium on Christmas morning eight months later. Phyllis Green was at his bedside. His remains were brought home to Tiree and he was buried in Kirkapol.

Indeed, of the five students brought to Edinburgh to train for a Highland ministry only two survived. Dugald Lamont was placed as a student missionary in Buessan. Edward Campbell became a student missionary in Skye with Francis Taylor (later Tiree's Baptist minister), and went on to serve in a number of churches; he was latterly Convener of the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland. Neil Graham went to Colonsay but died of tuberculosis in 1928. Archibald MacDonald also died of tuberculosis. The suspicion must be that it was in the attic of their digs in Merchiston that the infection took hold. Consumption was quite common in Edinburgh at the time, with 400 deaths from the disease recorded in the city in 1906. On Tiree it was less common, causing just 2 out of 41 deaths in 1900. Neil's fellow patient, Dr Christopher Clayson, recovered and went on to become President of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh and live to the age of 102. Phyllis Green returned to England. She never married and died in Lewes, Sussex, in 1957. Southfield Sanatorium became a geriatric hospital after effective treatments for tuberculosis became widespread in the 1950s; it closed in 1999.



Neil's school leaving Certificate of Merit.

The summer following Neil's death, his Edinburgh supervisor Cecil Shipley wrote to Phyllis Green on the eve of her visit to Milton:

Dear Miss Green, I am writing to you this evening so that it may reach you on the eve of your visit to Tiree, and to the home of our dear friend and brother Neil. I want you to carry loving messages of sympathy from my wife and me to Mrs MacArthur – whom we know personally – and to the other members of the family to whom our hearts go out in affectionate thoughts. When Neil passed away, I wrote a brief notice in the Baptist Times which I think you saw. I feel sure his parents will realise how sincerely we loved and admired Neil for the quiet grace of his character. During the long time he was laid aside, that gentleness and grace of spirit became steadily more beautiful; we can never forget the wonder of his patience, his courage, his quiet restfulness of faith. You know what great hopes we had for him as we recognise his gifts as a student, his eager application to his studies, his power of reception, his ability to think to express his thoughts. These gifts, with the quiet charm of his personality, and his earnestness in spiritual things made me to confidently anticipate for him a most useful future. I thought of him in years to come as probably the leader of the Baptist Mission in the Hebrides. We can imagine how thoroughly he would

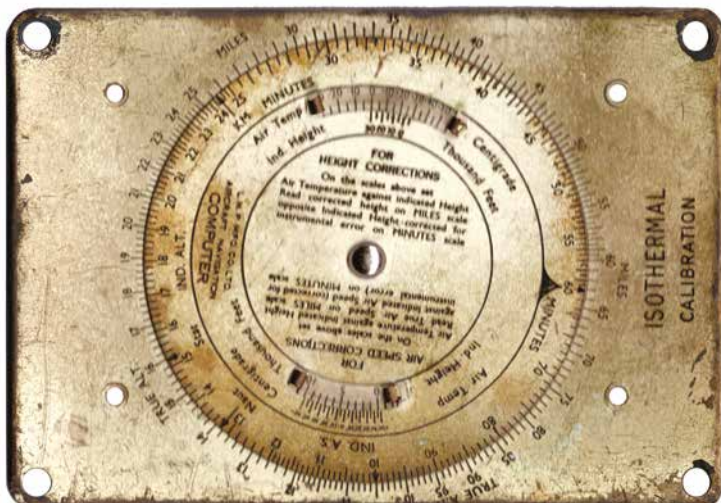
have filled such a position when he had gained experience in service. But these things were not to be, and instead he has left us the memory of one of the choicest spirits it has been our privilege to know. I am so glad you are going to Tiree ... I do not know how long you will be staying in Tiree, but if you are staying over a Sabbath could you not tell the congregation at the chapel about Neil and how we all loved him. Perhaps you might find it rather a trial, but it would be the fulfilment of a privilege – and a duty – that we owe to the dear servant of Christ who has gone from us. I must not write more. We shall be thinking of you and the circle that will gather in the home by the sea. As you talk together about Neil, tell our dear friends how I and many others in Edinburgh will never forget him nor cease to cherish his memory as one of God's dear children, whose faith shone brightly through all his days and whose spirit became increasingly beautiful as he was called to pass through the long avenue of pain and suffering. I am, dear Miss Green, Yours very truly, Cecil E Shipley.

It is a fitting epitaph.

We are profoundly grateful to Flo Straker for her detailed research into the life of Phyllis Green; Rev Dr Brian Talbot, the Pastor of Broughty Ferry Baptist Church and Rev Garry Ketchen, Pastor of Bristo Baptist Church; Flora MacPhail; and Catriona Smyth.

Archivist's Choice

by Janet Bowler, Archive Manager



During WWII, each crew of an RAF aircraft would have had one of these drift calculators – a flat, metal device strapped to the thigh of their navigator along with a roll of recording paper. Drift calculators enabled correction of the aircraft's height and air speed according to air temperature. When this one was brought to *An Iodhlann* just a couple of months ago, I was struck by the poignancy of its provenance. It had been found just north of Island House and was therefore likely to have been attached to the leg of one of the two navigators who tragically died, along with the rest of their crews, when two Halifax aircraft of 518 Squadron collided in mid-air above Island House in August 1944. This item is currently on show in one of our glass display cases at the Airport, courtesy of Karl Hughes.

Thank you all for your membership of *An Iodhlann*. Do keep in touch though the year if you come across anything of interest to the Tiree historical community.

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