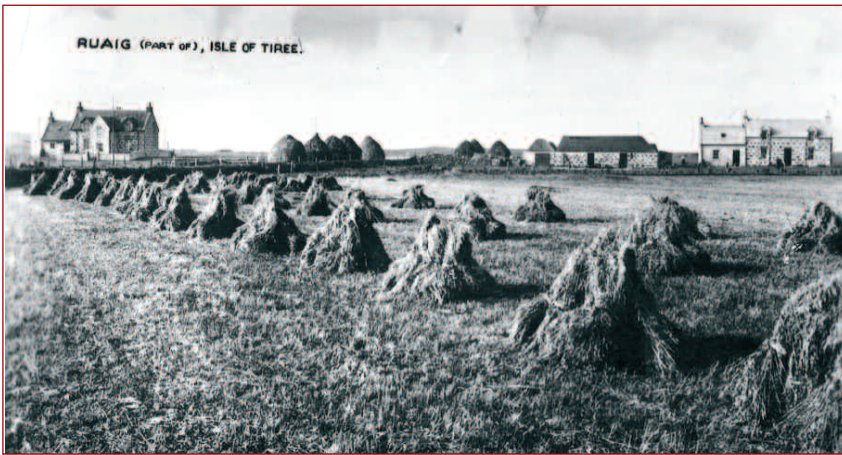


Newsletter of An Iodhlann's members

The voyage of the good ship An Iodhlann continues to fascinate, puzzle, frustrate and inspire those of us in the engine room. But here are three wonderful flying fish that have flopped on deck unexpectedly in the last six months!

THE HONGS OF TIREE

It was one of those 'An Iodhlann moments' when your heart misses a beat. Hugh Lamont, the Ruaig postmaster who was born in 1886, was a 'character' still remembered on the island. His *sloinneadh*, or patronymic, was *Eòghann Iain na Hongs* - Hugh, the son of Iain of Hong Kong.



*Post card of Ruaig from the 1930s.
The house on the left is that of Hugh
Lamont, Taigh Eòghainn Iain na
Hongs, Ruaig post office at the time.*

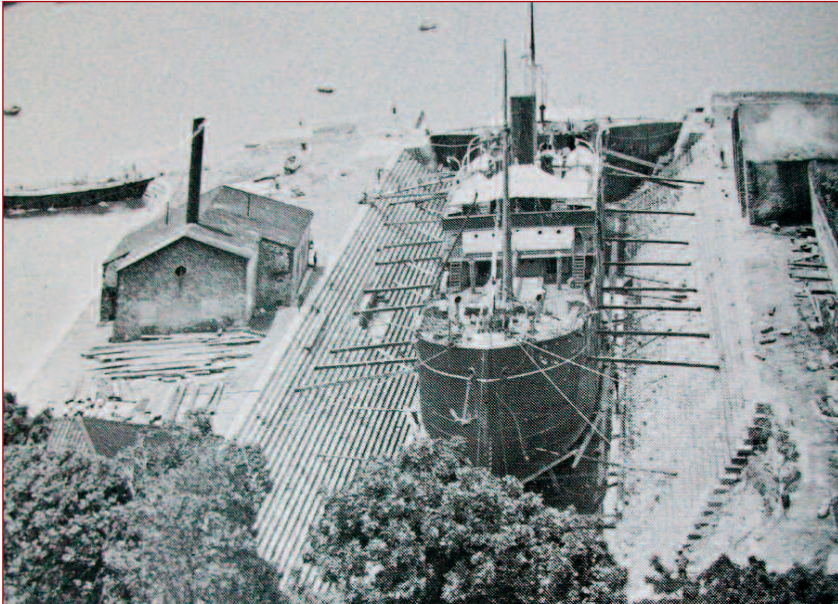
The story was that an ancestor had made a fortune in Hong Kong, but no one on Tiree knew more than that. Then Duncan Grant got a call. Susan Lamont from Devon wondered if we had any information about her great grandfather, John Lamont, who had left Ruaig as a ship's carpenter in the 1820s and built the first dock in Hong Kong, becoming a millionaire in the process.

John Lamont was an early European settler who became one of the foremost entrepreneurs of the new colony.

Those involved in the repairing and building of ships formed a well-respected group of skilled men... Most prominent among them was John Lamont, a Scottish ships carpenter... who was set up by Jardine Matheson and Co. with his own slipway in East Point as early as 1843 [one year after the colony was formed], where the company's barques and clippers could be looked after and repaired.

In 1853 John Lamont also built Hong Kong's first steamship, *The Queen*, a wooden boat of 137 tons, for Douglas Lapraik, a well-known local businessman. He had now reached the next stage in his business career. In 1859 he built Hong Kong's first dry dock next to his shipyard in Aberdeen. Aberdeen is on the south side of Hong Kong Island, named after the British Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, the Earl of Aberdeen. He was also something of an inventor, proposing the lining of docks with rubber which was then a new product in the Far East.

Encouraged by the success of Lamont Dock, he went into a joint venture with Douglas Lapraik, planning a larger dock on neighbouring land. The British Government gave them a £3,000 grant, anxious to develop a facility in the Far East for its larger warships. But the prospect of large government contracts stimulated the interest of Hong Kong's largest ship owners.



*The Lamont Dock in
Hong Kong harbour.*

Lamont added another dock to his enterprise, the Hope Dock, but before the latter was finished, both docks were bought, in 1865, by the large and very successful firm, the Hong Kong and Whampoa Dock Co. [an alliance of P&O, Jardine Matheson and Douglas Lapraik].

Lamont had been born in Ruaig in 1804. His father, Archibald, was described on John's death certificate as a 'farmer' or crofter. John had two brothers, Donald and Hugh, who between them had 8 children. We don't know much about his early life, when he left Tیره or how he reached Hong Kong. He must have been at sea where the practical skills he would have learned from his father would have been useful. He arrived in Hong Kong in his middle thirties. The European population of the colony was still small and he became a well-known figure.

Slim and bronzed, with humorous grey eyes, Lamont always wore at least one item of Scottish tartan, and spoke such broad Scot that no one understood him when he first arrived. He, like Douglas Lapraik, had settled in Hong Kong with a Chinese 'Protected Woman'. He was also one of those rare men who were able to move in any society and seemed equally at home whoever he happened to be with...One must admire such a man who could overcome all obstacles, get on with everybody and create for himself a happy home life with his two young boys and their Chinese mother.

Tیره Gaelic would have been his first language and he probably learnt most of his English as a young sailor, giving him a rich mixture of accents. He seems to have been proud of his Scottish identity. The Dress Act had prohibited the personal wearing of tartan in 1746. Although it was repealed in 1782, Lamont's wearing of it was sending out a strong message.

Europeans were strongly discouraged from marrying local girls, but Lamont settled down with Awa Moy, who had the status of a 'Chinese Protected Woman.' They had two sons - Charles, born in 1847, and Archibald, who was born in 1851. These were both baptised in 1852, possibly in a Chinese bowl still owned by the family. The boys were both sent to a small private school in Peebles, although their Tیره family believed they later went to Eton. It was said that they came once on holiday to Tیره to stay with their relations. They were not impressed with the food and never returned!

Lamont had sold his shipyard interests in 1865 and returned to Scotland. Whether this was a holiday or a move to be nearer his children we don't know. He died in the Douglas Hotel, Aberdeen, Scotland, on 25 August 1866 at the age of 62. His death certificate records him as a Master Shipbuilder, and, poignantly, as single. The form lists his usual residence as Cathay House, Cullen, living with his son Archibald.

Although he died in his native land, his death was marked in Hong Kong.

When [John Lamont] died, the Governor himself proposed a toast to the memory of this once 'common carpenter' who partly with the firm's support had made a large fortune. The Thistle and the Jade: a Celebration of 175 years of Jardine, Matheson and Co. ed. Maggie Keswick, Frances Lincoln, 2008.

He had certainly done well in his adopted country. He left £1000 (the equivalent today of £80,000) to his eight Tíree nephews and nieces, and an allowance of £400 a year (the equivalent today of £30,000) to his sons until they reached the age of 30, when they received their full inheritance. Matheson was his executor. The docks were heavily bombed by the Japanese before their invasion of Hong Kong in 1941, but continued to operate until the 1950s.

As a remarkable postscript to this story a century later, another Tíree man, Alasdair MacArthur, Roisgal, worked with the Hong Kong police in 1952. The police training school was in Aberdeen near the Lamont and Hope Docks. He remembers Lamont dock as being fairly small by modern standards - as he says, "the Vital Spark might have fitted inside." Twenty years later the docks were taken over again, this time by Hong Kong United Dockyards, who then moved their operations out to Tsing Yi. And in 1976 Alasdair was in charge of moving the remaining workforce from Lamont Dock out to the new base. Built by a Tíree man and closed down by another!

In 1985 the area was redeveloped and the two docks now lie beneath the second largest private housing estate in Hong Kong.

Thanks to Susan Lamont, Kathleen Kennedy, and to Alasdair MacArthur for this information. If there are any other family members out there, please get in touch!

TÍREE VOICES SPEAK AGAIN

We have given a £15,000 grant to Tobar an Dualchais, the Skye-based group that are putting recordings from the School of Scottish Studies online. Funding dried up and we have been able to kick-start the Tíree part of the project again. This is a transcription of Donald Sinclair, West Hynish, talking to Eric Cregeen in three excerpts from 1968-70.



A funeral cortege approaches Cladh Shorabaigh, Soroby graveyard, in the 1920s. From the collection of Myra Lamont.

EC: Are there beliefs that, if you have a cold feeling, somebody is standing on your grave?

DS: Yes! Yes! You've got shivers! I heard that often. "Tha crith orm. Tha cuideigin a' coiseachd air m' uaigh." "I'm shivering and somebody is walking on my grave!" But it's not very nice to walk on a grave. It's a thing I never did.

EC: Was there a belief in Tíree that the last person to be buried [in a graveyard] would keep watch?

DS: Yes! Yes! Until another person would be buried. And then he was getting released, and this new arrival was taking over the watch. And that's going on, and most of the Tíree people are believing it to this day.

EC: Did they ever use black soot from the chimney?

DS: No!...The only thing I seen used was salt. I was told that the salt was put on a plate on the body of the corpse so as to keep down swelling. That was the cause of it. I've seen that.

EC: Did you ever see them put a drink for a corpse at all, water.

DS: Not that was before my time. It happened even in this township too. My elder sister. I don't know which part of the island was she in service. And there was a corpse in the house. And there was an old lady in the house. She happened to be sleeping with the old lady. And the old lady turned round at bed time and said, "We have to leave a jug of water on the table in case my sister that's dead will be thirsty." That old lady was believing in that... that was damn nonsense!

SA 1969.160, SA1970.05 and SA 1968.248.

There are thousands more at www.tobarandualchais.org. Highly recommended!

ROOF REVEALS SHARP SECRETS!

We had a couple of rather scary accessions during the summer. Ian Atkins brought in two ancient, but very sharp, bayonets into the archive. They had been hidden in the turf of his house on Cnoc Bhiostadh in Kilmoluaig, and were found during re-thatching in 2005. The first is a British pattern Martini-Henry socket triangular-bladed bayonet made famous during the Zulu Wars. It was manufactured in 1876 and used into the early 1900s. The second is a short sword with brass handle, modelled on a Turkish sword shape, which could also be fitted to a rifle and used as a bayonet. Identification marks show it was produced near Poitiers for the French Army in 1873. The fascinating question is this – how did they end up in a Tìree thatched roof? Steve's theory is that they were hidden in a hurry in 1886 when the marines 'invaded' Tìree to deal with the land agitation.



*The two bayonets
from Taigh Iain
Chaluim,
Kilmoluaig.*

CÀTH

- We have decided to offer life membership for £80. Contact the Membership Department in the usual way. An ideal Christmas gift for anyone out there fond of the wee island!
- We receive a large number of family history documents every year, but special mention must go to Glenda McPhadden Franklin and Gene Donald Lamont for their 304 page epic, The MacFadyen-McPhadden Family in Tìree and Coll. Beat that!
- Our place name database has now gone on line. 3297 names as I write, including some family information relating to croft and house names. www.tireeplacenames.org
- Our website will soon have eleven past exhibition texts, ranging from shops to golf courses to horses.
- This edition is the first where the electronic version is longer than the paper one. Apologies to those who are not online, but copying and postage costs make it harder to send more paper around the world. Hopefully small is beautiful!
- Next year's exhibition will be about the history of crofting on Tìree. We thank DiscoverTìree for funding a new exhibition board about the unglamorous, but fascinating, subject of services – when did mains water, electricity, roads and television come to the island?
- I would be keen to see any flints that anyone finds on the island, and information about where they were found. Drop them in to An Iodhlann for a day or two if you can.
- Thanks to all of you for your support again, and here's to some more 'An Iodhlann moments'!

Leading Stoker John Holliday.