

L1.50

Comunn Eachdraidh

Sgir'a Bhar

Old School Canteen  
BACK  
Isle of Lewis  
PA86 CLT  
Tel. - Back 610

LITIR

FIOSRACHADH

THINGS  
YOU WANT  
TO KNOW  
ABOUT ..

Don't let this  
gather  
dust!



THE LATE PETER LIDDLE AT THE INGATHERING OF THE HAY BY  
THE MILL AT GRESS

*"At his home Peter entertained all and sundry with characteristic Highland hospitality"*





1st Row L - R.-M Graham, 8 Back, Catherine Macleod & Christine MacLeod 44 Back,  
M MacDonald, 6 Coll, M MacDonald, 9 Coll, Seonaid Stewart, 10 Back,  
J Murray, Tolsta, M Murray, 7 Back, C Murray 33 Vatisker, C Mackenzie, 51 Back.  
2nd Row - A MacAskill, Lighthill, C MacDonald, 9 Coll, C B MacDonald, 9 Coll,  
B A MacLeod, 19 Vatisker, M MacRae, 33 Back, Annabella MacLeod, 4 Back,  
C B MacIver, 12 Vatisker, K A MacIver, 20 Vatisker,  
Annabella Macleod, 20 Gress, D MacLeod, 4 Back 3rd Row - 1,2,&3 Unknown. C Graham,  
Brevig, Mr & Mrs R Gordon, Fish Curer, A Morrison, 26 Vatisker, Matilda Murray,  
Catherine Hill, P Graham, 15 Back, A Ferguson, 32 Vatisker. 4th Row - A Ferguson, 19  
Vatisker, 2, 3, & 4 Unknown. M Graham, 22 Vatisker,  
D Stewart, 10 Back, Jane MacIver, 23 Coll.  
Sitting, all East Coasters. Alastair Mor (Alex Summers) sitting at end of 4th  
Row. He married Christine Graham, Brevig, (4th in 3rd Row).  
His brother William Mor (Summers) end of 4th Row (Standing).



## INTRODUCTION

Those of us old enough to have lived through a part of each half of the present century cannot fail to recognise the many changes that have taken place - some with rapidity - in our island life.

Since mid-century change has progressed apace and in such a situation it is all too easy for matters relating to the past to fade and disappear in the mists of oblivion. For this reason, we are indebted to the Comunn Eachdraidh and particularly to those who are so willing to give of their time and energy to delve into the past and put on record such interesting aspects of local community life.

In this edition of our letter we have an article on the Airigh - that most evocative of Lewis pursuits of a past age - and the writer brings to the fore words that were at one time part of household vocabulary but are no longer in common use. Other contributions cover local people, local history and geography, including the Chapel at Gress, the Church at Back and Cnoc an t-Solais. To add to the variety, there is mention of poaching and distilling, catering, as it were, for many tables.

The photographs, we feel sure, will generate interest, as they always do.





'A Leigeil Sgoth 'an Duncan'

John Macleod 'Laddy', 60 Coll  
 Donald Maciver, 36 Upper Coll  
 Donald Mackenzie 'Dan', 48 Coll  
 Kenneth Macdonald, 3 Upper Coll  
 John Maciver 'Glog', 49 Coll  
 Kenneth Maciver 'Tutan', 61 Coll  
 John Macleod, 60 Coll



NOTE ON A BACK EMIGRANT FROM KILLARNEY, MANITOBA IN NOVEMBER 1889  
Kenneth Macaulay on No 10 Section

House: 14' x 16' double boarded and packed between with soil.  
Has built small log addition.

Stable: Good log and turf stable.

Ploughing, etc: 45 acres ready for crop. Has one well but very little water in it.

Improvement as above: Valued at 230 dollars.

Stock: Yoke of oxen, one cow, 1 yearling, 1 calf, two pigs.

Crop 1889: 120 bushels of wheat from seven acres  
No oats, 60 bushels of potatoes  
30 loads of hay

Remarks: Isabella (daughter) out at service at seven dollars a month. John (son) at work at twenty dollars a month. Neil Munro at work at 'Rat Portage' at one dollar fifty cents a day, permanent work.

Kenneth Macaulay says "I am quite satisfied and will have sufficient seed, other settlers are not so advanced after being here six years as we are in less than two years. If half the Island of Lewis would come here they would be alright". Six acres broken on John Macaulay's homestead valued at twenty five dollars. Seven acres broken on Neil Munro's homestead valued at seventeen dollars and fifty cents.

Kenneth Macaulay (son of Angus Macaulay, Coll) emigrated with his family from 38 Back.

Neil Munro (single) emigrated from 40 Back. Later returned to Lewis and bought a holding in Barvas.





Coll River





Rugadh Ruairidh MacChoinnich Aonghais anns a bhliadhna 1872. Air dha an sgoil fhagail, chaidh a chuir as a leth gun do ghearr e earball loth' og, ach ged a bha Ruairidh neo-chiontach cha chreideadh athair facal dhe. Thug athair smachdachadh air nach do chord ris a ghille idir, agus ruith an t-oganach air falbh bho'n tigh agus chaidh e do'n Navy. 'S iongantach mur do ghabh athair aithreachas air son an droch laimhseachadh a thug e air a mhac agus cheannaich e Ruairidh a-mach as an t-seirbheis.

'Nuair a thainig Ruairidh gu aois ochd bliadhna deug, ghabh e do'n Navy cheangaltach agus bha e air saor-dhuais bliadhnach (pension) a' thoirt a-mach mur do thoisich cogadh 1914-18.

Bha Ruairidh fhein ag radh gu robh e air bord na luinge-cogaidh MHS 'Orama' ann am meadhon a 'Phacific' agus grunnan de bhalaich Leodhais maille ris. "Bha mi", ars esan, "a coiseachd clar uachdar (deck) na luinge 'nuair a' chuala mi dithis bhalach a bhuineadh do Nis a' deanamh feal-dha air mar a' ghearr iad earball lotha air mointeich a Bhac, 's iad a' deanamh an t-slighe dhachaidh air dhaibh a bhith a' tilleadh bho'n Fheachd-duthcha (Militia)". 'Se seo mar a chaidh faighinn a-mach aobhair smachdachaidh Ruairidh. Bha e aig an am a bha seo na fhear-teagaisg ghunnachan (gunnery instructor) agus faodaidh sinn a bhith cinnteach nach robh beatha shona aig na balaich an deigh sin.

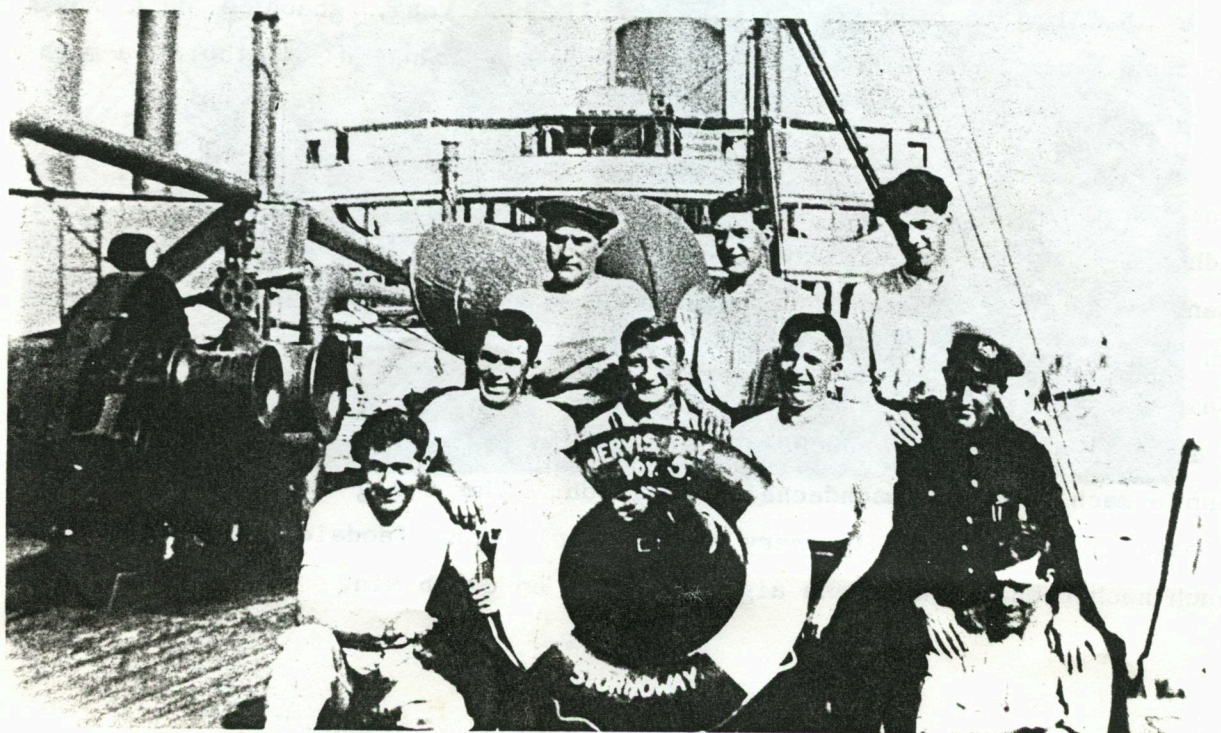


An ceann bheagan uine bha HMS 'Crama' a sas ann an cath na Falklands agus gabhaidh e chreidsinn nach ann air earball lotha a bha iad a bhruidhinn aig an am sin.

'Se duine neo-ghealtach a bha 'n seo agus cuideachd neach aig nach robh athadh bho rud sam bith.

Cha chualas moran mu thimchioll Ruairidh eadar an da chogadh. Ged a' bha e tri fichead bliadhna agus a seachd 'nuair a bhris cogadh 1939-45 a-mach agus ged a bha e tuilleadh is aosda air son feuchainn do'n Navy a rithist, cha do chum sin e bho obair-mara. Thog e air gu ruige baile mor Lunnain agus bha e na bhosun air soitheach-luchd. Rinn e dha no tri thurais mara air a bhata seo agus fhuair e obair na fhear-faire air a bhata am 'Politician' ann am Barraidh ach cha do dh'fhuirich e fada 'n sin. Chuir e aghaidh air Glaschu far an d'fhuair e obair air bataichean slaodaigh (tug service), obair a bha freagarrach dha a chionn 's gu robh e comasach dha teagaisg ghunnachan a' toirt do bhalaich og. Ach cha robh sin gu leor do Ruairidh - bha shuill a-mach airson seoladairean sgilear airson an obair sin. Fhuair e aireamh mor a lean e, eadar Leodhas agus Sealtainn.

Seo a nis mar a chrìochnaich e seoladaireachd agus e tri fichead bliadhna agus tri deug a dh'aois.





## CNOC AN T-SOLAIS

Tha e na cheisd do chuid de dhaoine, c'aite a' bheil an cnoc seo, na carson a tha e air ainmeachadh mar 'Cnoc an t-Solais'.

'Se mullach an cnuic sin an aite a's am bheil No 58 Back agus bha moran thighean ann a sin a's a linn a chaidh seachad.

'Se cul a bhaile a bh'ann aig an am sin, agus cha d'fhuair na daoine sin croitean gu 1876.

Bha da bhreabadair a fuireachd ann, fear aca ris an canadh iad Tormod Buachaill agus fear eile, Calum Breabadair.

Mar a thuigeadh sin, dh'fheumadh solas gu math ladair a bhi aig breabadair. Bhitheadh iad ag radh as bith cuin a shealladh tu suas gun a chnuic sin gum bitheadh solas ri fhaicean ann agus bha e air a radh gu robh na solais sin na chuideachadh mor dha na daoine a bha stridh ris a mhuir agus gur iomadh oidhche bha e na comharradh airson a tabhairt gu caladh.

Tha a nis cnoc eile a mach an iar air 'Cnoc an t-Solais' ris an canadh iad 'Sithean Stranglan' agus tha cuid a' dol iomrail mu ainmeachadh an da chnoc.

Aig an am seo, bha an t-sraid gu leir air a h-ainmeachadh mar 'Cnoc an t-Solais'.

Tha cuid ag radh gur e ainm ur a th'ann an 'Cnoc an t-Solais' ach de am focal a tha cho seann ri solas.





## RELIGION AT BACK

It cannot be ascertained when religion in Back began to be practised publicly. Angus Maciver from Uig was a teacher and catechist in Back for two periods, 1830 - 1855.

It was said that he was an excellent preacher and as precentor at communions was gifted with a melodious voice which caused great impression on his hearers.

The minister who had the oversight in Back during this period was the Rev John Cameron, Stornoway. He preached in Back every fifth Sabbath.

At this time, the Rev Duncan Matheson was minister at Knock. It seems that he attracted hearers from Back and Coll. They crossed Broad Bay in boats to attend his services on the Sabbath. This inevitably led to trouble with the minister in Stornoway because Back was part of his parish.

In 1845, there were only two ministers of the Free Church in the whole Island of Lewis to supply ordinances to a population of about 18,000 souls. This was two years after the Disruption. A meeting house, 'An Eaglais Bheag' was built on the site of the present church and in 1877 it was enlarged.

The Back contribution to the Sustention Fund in 1846 was £44-12s-2d and in 1877 it was £90-4s-0d.

In a small column of the Highland News of 10 January 1891:

### "Back New Church

The arrangements for the building of the new church are now progressing. The Committee met on Monday and approved the plans and specification. The church is to be built to accommodate eleven hundred persons."



The first minister at Back was the Rev Donald Macmaster. He was born in Kilmallie in 1827. He studied at both Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities. He underwent his divinity course at New College, Edinburgh, and was subsequently ordained and inducted to Back in 1859 and remained there until 1876, when he was transferred to the congregation of Kildonan.

The second minister was the Rev John Maclean, a native of Islay, and a son of Neil Maclean, who was instrumental in the conversion of the Rev Hector Cameron's father. Rev John Maclean was inducted in 1877 and remained until 1880. He later served the congregations of Shiskine (Arran) and Tarbert (Harris).

The third minister was the Rev Hector Cameron, who was inducted in June 1881, continuing in a fruitful ministry until the summer of 1907, when he had to retire because of ill health. He was an eminent preacher and a man of strong convictions. He strongly opposed any proposed union with other churches, fearing that the constitutional traditions of the Free Church would be impaired. This is probably the reason why there is only one church at Back in contrast to other districts, where two and sometimes three denominations may be found. He passed away in Dingwall in 1908.

The fourth minister was the Rev Roderick Mackenzie, who was a native of Crossbost, and born in 1863. He spent a period of time in the army and afterwards worked in a bakery in Glasgow, where he felt the call to the ministry. He did a considerable amount of preaching as a student during the 1900 union controversy. His first charge was Barvas. He received a call from Back which he accepted in 1910. His period of ministry at Back has been, so far, the longest, extending from 1910 until 1946, in which year he passed away.

The fifth minister was the Rev Alexander Macleod, a native of Broke, Point. He served with the Seaforth Highlanders during the 1914-18 War. After the cessation of hostilities, he responded to a call to the ministry, attending Edinburgh University and the Free Church College afterwards. After a 10-year period in Ness, 1929-39, he accepted a call to Govan. In 1947, he took up ministerial duties at Back, continuing there until his death in 1954, which was rather unexpected and was a great loss.



The sixth minister was the Rev Murdo Macaulay, a native of Carloway. Born in 1907, he attended the Nicolson Institute and later joined the army. His uncle bought him out in order to help with his business at Carloway. He came under the influence of the gospel while serving with the Ross Mountain Battery. He rose to Lieutenant rank in World War II. His regiment was captured at St Valery and he spent the rest of the war in a prison camp in Germany. After the war, he studied in Edinburgh University and afterwards at the Free Church College. He was minister at Govan from 1949-56 when he accepted a call to Back, where he completed a fruitful period as preacher, retiring in 1975.

The seventh and present minister is the Rev Alasdair Montgomery, who was born in Balallan in 1929 and whose family moved to Stornoway in 1932. He was educated at the Nicolson Institute and thereafter trained as a marine engineer in Glasgow. He served in the merchant service for 4 years. An inevitable call to the service of the Lord caused him to enter Aberdeen University, followed by a divinity course at the Free Church College, Edinburgh. Inducted to Scalpay, Harris, in 1965, he served fruitfully there for 11 years. He accepted a call to Back in 1976 and, since that time, has endeared himself to the congregation as a spiritual preacher, acceptable to old and young. English services are generally very well attended, particularly by the younger generation who nowadays appear to understand the English vocabulary better than Gaelic. We wish him more years of service in this district.



Donald Murray 'Domhnull Stand', 7 Back  
Donald Maciver 'Domhnull na Creamaig', 1 Vatisker  
Alex Neil Kennedy, 13 Back



There are no session records available for office bearers prior to 1905. The reason for this is not known. However, this is a record of their names commencing 1905:

#### Elders 1905

Kenneth Macleod, Coll  
George Maciver, Vatisker  
Donald Munro, Back  
Alexander Thomson, Tong  
Roderick Mackay, Tolsta  
Angus Macleod, Tolsta  
Angus Mackay, Tolsta  
Norman Mackenzie, Lighthill  
Alexander Maciver, Tong

Coinneach Tailleur  
Seoras Og  
Domhnull a Hearrach  
Alasdair Thomson  
Ruairidh 'an Ruairidh  
Aonghas Mhurch' 'c Uilleim  
Aonghas MhicAoidh  
Tormod an t-Sithean  
Alasdair MhicIomhair

#### Deacons 1905

No record

#### Elders 1910

John Cameron, Tong  
Donald Macaskill, Back  
Alexander Stewart, Vatisker  
Alexander Macdonald, Tolsta  
Norman Macleod, Tolsta  
Alexander Graham, Lighthill  
John Morrison, Lighthill  
Malcolm Stewart, Coll  
Donald MacIennan, Tong  
Murdo Mackenzie, Coll

Iain Mhurch' 'c Thormoid  
Domhnull Alasdair Mhurchaidh  
Alasdair Stiubhart  
Alasdair Ruadh  
Tormod Dhomhnuill Ruaidh  
Alasdair Aonghas Creumair  
Iain Alasdair Ruaidh  
Calum Ruadh  
Domhnull Og  
Murchadh Iain

#### Deacons 1910

Norman Mackenzie, Coll  
John Murray, Tolsta  
Roderick Mackay, Tolsta  
Alexander Graham, Back  
Angus Stewart, Back  
Kenneth Maciver, Vatisker  
Alexander Ferguson, Vatisker  
Angus Stewart, Coll  
Murdo Macdonald, Coll  
Murdo Macdonald, Tong  
Angus Smith, Coll

Tormod Alasdair Thormoid  
Iain Mhurchaidh Choinnich  
Ruairidh Thormoid Iain  
Alasdair Mhic Dhomhnuill  
Aonghas Mhurch' Dhonnachaidh  
Coinneach Ruairidh  
Alasdair Neill Iomhair  
Aonghas Dhomhnuill Ruaidh  
Murchadh Domhnullach  
Murchadh Ruadh  
Aonghas Thearlaich



### Elders 1921

Peter Macleod, Tong  
Angus Smith, Coll  
Kenneth Maciver, Vatisker  
Alexander Ferguson, Vatisker  
Murdo Morrison, Lighthill  
Donald Macleod, Back

Padruig 'an a Gille Phadruig  
Aonghas Thearlaich  
Coinneach Ruairidh  
Alasdair Neill Iomhair  
Murchadh Sheorais  
Domhnall Uilleim Alasdair

### Deacons 1921

John Macdonald, Tong  
Colin Finlayson, Tong  
Angus Mackenzie, Coll  
Kenneth Beaton, Coll  
John Graham, Coll  
Murdo Mackay, Vatisker  
John Maciver, Vatisker  
Angus Macleod, Vatisker  
William Macleod, Back  
Evander Ferguson, Back

Iain Dhomhnuill Ruaidh  
Calan Uilleim  
Aonghas Mhurchaidh Iain  
Coinneach Sheumais Alasdair  
Iain Aonghais 'an a Creumair  
Murchadh Dhomhnuill Alasdair  
Iain Ruairidh  
Aonghas Dhomhnuill  
Uilleam Choinnich Aonghais  
Iomhair Neill Iomhair

The rest of the names from 1929 onwards are well-known to most of the seniors of the present generation.

Session meetings are attended by elders only. Deacon Court meetings are attended by Elders and Deacons.



*Induction of Rev Macritchie, Stornoway*



### 'SMUGLAIGEADH'

About 150 to 200 years ago, distilling of whisky was carried on in this district like many other parts of Lewis. The villages of Coll, Back and Vatisker had fairly good soil for the growing of barley, although sometimes oat seed was used for making whisky. Many of the places where stills were worked have been forgotten but there are still a few places which can be pointed out. Three in particular are on the Coll side of the Coll River at 'An Fhaing Ruadh'.

Another at Loch an Eallaich on the Coll/Vatisker boundary near Garadh Thomaïs. There was also one at the shore at Brebhig about 40 yards east of the port. There is a cutting in the rock which is still known as the 'Tigh Staile'. Within living memory, an old lady used to plant potatoes with the spade here and she would turn up old coins of George IV and William IV vintage so that the place was referred to as 'Talamh an Airgiod'.

All this activity was, of course, illegal, but the proprietor turned a blind eye to it as long as the people could get enough money to pay their rents. The people they had to be wary of were the excisemen and anyone caught at the distilling could expect a term of imprisonment which in those days was no picnic. Whenever there was any rumour of the gaugers snooping around they would very quickly dismantle the gear and hide it.

The brewing of beer was also carried on but this was not illegal as long as it was for their own use and none of it was sold.

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### DOL DH'AN AN TOBAIR

The first piped water supply in this district was installed in 1956. Before then, people had to rely on wells, of which there were many all over the place and they were known by the name of the person on whose croft they was situated. The water was carried in pails but in the old days it was sometimes carried in a Buideal. This was a small watertight barrel which was carried on the back like a creel with a hand called an 'iris' across the chest.



Besides the wells, which were built up with stones and covered, there were smaller fountains called 'fuarain' which were often recesses in the rocks which kept the water which seeped out of the rock face. One of the best of these was 'Fuaran a Stall' in Coll, about 200 yards west of 'Rudha nan Gall'. The water spouted out of the rock face about the thickness of a man's arm. There was 'Fuaran Bhrebhig' beside the 'Tigh Staile', from which the people got their water until the advent of piped water. Other 'fuarans' at Vatisker to which people resorted during a drought were 'Fuaran an Ro' and 'Fuaran Sgeir Lios'. Two more at Back were 'Fuaran Port a Bhata' and 'Fuaran na Buaile Duibhe'.

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#### 'SEANN SAIGHDEARAN'

About two hundred years ago, Great Britain was nearly always engaged in wars in many parts of the world. The King or the Government would ask the landed proprietors such as the Earl of Seaforth to raise a regiment from his tenantry. The result of this was that quite a number from Lewis would be serving in the army. In the year 1782, there were at least 16 men from Lewis in the 100th Regiment of Foot, which later was absorbed into the 72nd Regiment of Foot and was then absorbed into the Seaforth Highlanders. In that year, a battle was fought at Savannah Bay in South Africa between the Regiment and the Dutch settlers. The place is some miles north west of Cape Town. The British won the battle and managed to sieze 5 Dutch ships with their cargoes. Among the Lewis soldiers were a father and son from Vatisker called Kenneth Bain and John Bain. The name Bain is not a Lewis name and we can only assume that they were known as Coinneach Ban and Iain Ban. In those days, the recruiting sergeants probably spoke only English and the Lewismen would have little or no English. We are reinforced in this assumption by the fact that there was a Roderick Murray in Vatisker at that time who was known locally as 'Ruairidh Gobha' and who appears in records in Edinburgh as Roderick Gow.

In any event, the Bains disappeared from the records after the Battle of Savannah Bay. It is not known if they were killed in the battle or went with the regiment to India or the East Indies. There were two girls in the family - Catherine and Isabella. Catherine was the older and married Alasdair Murray or



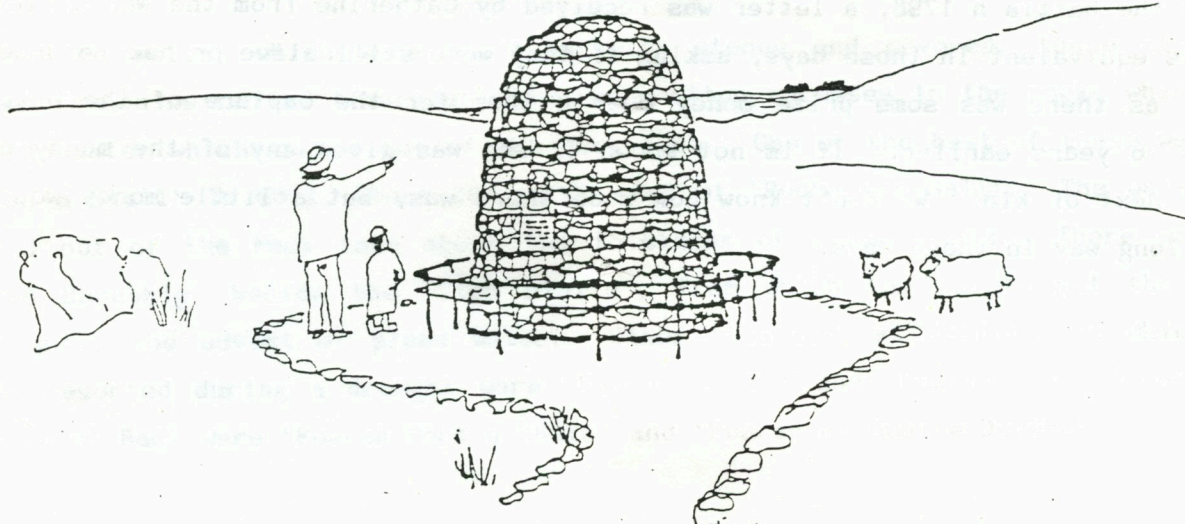
'Alasdair Ruairidh Ghobha' who had the croft at 20 Vatisker. Some 16 years after the battle in 1798, a letter was received by Catherine from the War Office, or its equivalent in those days, asking if they were still alive or had returned home, as there was some prize money due to them for the capture of the Dutch ships 16 years earlier. It is not known if she was given any of the money as their next of kin. We don't know how much there was, but a little money would go a long way in those days.



*Remains of buildings,  
Vatisker Shore*



## PROPOSED COMMEMORATIVE CAIRNS, ISLE OF LEWIS



### *Initial sketch proposals.*

This project for commemorative cairns is in recognition and honour of local leaders and historical events in the crofters struggle for land reform of the crofting struggle for land reform of the crofting communities.

Unfortunately, we have not taken any steps in Lewis to honour our land law reform heroes, or mark the events that took place in the crofters' struggle for emancipation.

As a community, we have sadly neglected our heritage and our local history and, as was wisely said long ago, "Whoever desires to build a future may not neglect the past". Because of that, both the local history and the names of the people that played a prominent part in these events are lost to the younger generation.

There has been a committee formed for this project and the district of Back is represented by one from the Back Historical Society.

We feel that this programme should be approached in a sensible manner and initial reaction from the public is encouraging and we feel confident that they will support the concept of preserving our distinctive culture.

In the Back district there should be no difficulty in locating a suitable site in the Gress and Upper Coll area, places where there was widespread raiding following the First World War. It would also create an attraction for visitors.



A SERMON PREACHED AT THE CLOSE OF OLD HOME WEEK IN SCOTSTOWN, QUEBEC  
AUGUST 7TH 1949

by Rev M N Macdonald, Ailsa Craig, Ont.

While looking at memory's page let me, in order to refresh your memory, recall an incident or two from their conversation. When I was a little boy, so young that he held me by the hand, I went with my grandfather, Macleod, for a visit to Angus MacIennan's (Aonghas Ruadh Chaluim Niall). Another neighbour, Donald Macleod (Dhomhnull Og) was visiting there at the same time. When the time came for us to go, grandfather took me again by the hand and both he and Dhomhnull Og left for home. As their homes were in different directions they parted at the gate. Never will I forget that parting. Standing there and holding his neighbour by the hand, grandfather's parting words were these. Oh Dhomhnuill, am bheil thu a g'ulluchadh airson breathanas. (Oh Donald, are you preparing for judgement). What the answer was I cannot recall but I do know that these parting words are for me today like the manna of our text, a memorial of the food wherewith our fathers were fed.

Another incident that some that are present can recall even better than I. It concerns that remarkable saint that was so well known throughout the whole of the Scottish settlement, Bess from Tolsta. At this time she was visiting the home of her late daughter in North Whitton. While there she wanted to visit another old saint, Mrs Macaulay (Grannie beag Dhomhnuill na Loch). When leaving for home, Mrs Macaulay walked a distance down the road with them. Before parting, the ground being grassy and dry, they sat for a rest on the edge of the ditch by the roadside. At last when parting time came her grand-daughters and other children that were with them were called and with these children kneeling beside them there by the roadside these two old friends had their parting prayers.

On this memorial day when we would recall the conversation, the faith and example of parents and others of which we are so proud, let us in all seriousness ask ourselves if we are worthy followers of such ancestors. They kept the Gospel torch burning brightly under the greatest difficulties: is it shining as brightly in our hands today?



Now for a moment let us look at a memorial that we can see with the physical eye, and we shall mention but one. But that one speaks with a clarion voice proclaiming plainly the food wherewith our fathers were fed. I am referring to the Cemeteries. And where can you see cemeteries like them. True you may find greater and more expensive stones and monuments, but here you find greater than marble and granite, you find that the sentinel over every grave is the Word of God. They are not quotations from the poets nor the sayings of the sages, they are passages from Holy Writ which was their meat and drink.

How tearfully and lovingly parents searched the word of God for the suitable verse to inscribe on the little stone that was to mark the resting place of child or children. Today we see another stone beside it bearing the names of father and mother, and again the Bible verse that proclaims to the world that here lies the dust of a people that knew God. Here is the resting place of a people that were not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ. "Fill an omer of it - that they may see the bread wherewith I have fed you".

In this as well as in many other scriptures the Lord has commanded the erection of memorials. When his people were passing through the Jordan they were commanded to take twelve stones and erect them on yonder shore that the rising generations might see them there as a memorial of God's mercy in bringing his people safely to the land of promise.



Tolsta Cemetery, Quebec, Canada  
Stone in foreground is that of  
Angus and Bess (Stewart) Macrae



## A CASE OF INJUSTICE - 1939

In 1939, Sheriff Macinnes, the Sheriff at Stornoway, took a lease of the salmon fishing at Gress. One of the mistakes he made was to approach a group of young men loitering on the Gress Bridge and to accuse them of studying the river with a view to poaching later that night.

One night, his gamekeeper surprised a group of men with a net at the river. The gamekeeper chased them and came close to one of them. Next morning, he went to the local policeman and gave him the description of one of the men he chased. He said he had red hair.

The policeman told him that he knew of one man who would fit this description. That would be Donald Macleod, locally known as 'Ginger'. They both went to his house. Donald's mother and sister told them that Donald had been in bed all night.

The gamekeeper insisted that Donald was definitely the man he had chased the night before. Donald was brought to trial. Sheriff Macinnes naturally did not take the case himself, but the substitute sheriff found Ginger guilty and sent him to jail for fourteen days.

The Sheriff dismissed the statement given by Donald's mother and sister on the grounds that the accused could easily have crept out of bed silently after they had gone to sleep.

How could any sheriff accept that identification by the gamekeeper in the darkest hour of the night?

It may well be that Donald's sentence was secretly agreed to before the trial.

Everyone in the village knew that Ginger was innocent and that he was never a poacher, and they were grieved at the injustice of the court.



The real poacher went to the Fiscal at once and told them that Ginger was innocent. The Fiscal stated that he believed him but he pointed out that it was no longer in his hands and if there had been a miscarriage of justice, the correct procedure was to appeal.

Ginger did not appeal. He could only 'get off the hook' by putting somebody else on it and, of course, he served his sentence.

Donald Macleod (Ginger) finished his sentence on the day of the Hospital Carnival. The young men of the village had a lorry ready for the Carnival procession. On it were half a dozen men with red hair and red beards. They had a herring net with a few herring meshed in it and a huge banner with 'The Red Haired Poachers of Back' written on it in big letters.

Donald Macleod was given a seat of honour on the lorry in the centre of the 'Red Haired Poachers'.

Sheriff Macinnes was an interested spectator of the carnival procession and it was said that when the Back lorry came on the scene he left for home - "a chogais chointeach bithidh i gealtach".



Murdo Macleod, Lighthill      Murdo Macdonald, Vatisker  
Chrissie Mary Ann Sarah      Dol-Angie Macleod, Lighthill  
Chrissie Matheson, Gearraidh Ghuirm      Sheila Stewart, Am Polagan





It is inevitable that difficult problems will arise when material concerning the history of our predecessors appears in print. The further back in time one goes, the more difficult it becomes to disentangle fact from fiction, and we must accept that some people are capable of embellishing events by the use of a vivid imagination.

One question, however, which is not controversial is that we, in Lewis, had a pre-Norse social organisation and religion in our island. How or when this took place is, sadly, very obscure, but some historians state that credit for the religious organisation is due to the work of St Ninian, one hundred years before St Columba came to Iona in 563 AD. The Celtic Church, thus established, was not under the jurisdiction of Rome.

We have reason to believe that there existed in Lewis, before the time of the Celtic Church, some forms of religious cults, and for evidence of this we may quote Julius Caesar, who said, "All the nation of the Gaels is exceedingly given to religious cults; very many devise new cults for themselves, arising from the particular spot in which they are".



In the Island of Lewis, it was customary to hold an anniversary festival in honour of Shony, the name the inhabitants gave to their sea-god. To this convention each family brought a peck of malt and after this was brewed into ale, a man, chosen from the assembled company, waded into the water to the depth of his midriff and poured into the sea a cupful of the libation, saying, "Shony, I offer you this cup of ale and pour it out to you, in the hope that you will send us plenty of sea-ware for enriching our fields in the ensuing year". We have no doubt that this idolatrous practice continued well into the Christian era.

There are numerous manastic ruins in Lewis named after Saints, most of the names relating to Saints mentioned during the period of St Columba and the Celtic Church. It is most likely that these ruins are pre-Norse.

There is one ancient chapel commemorating a saint who was obviously not a Celt, namely, St Aulay, or Ola, and this name indicates that the saint referred to was of Norse origin. History tells us that when the Norsemen invaded the Western Isles they were pagans and that they entered upon an orgy of destruction, destroying all the chapels and religious buildings of the Celtic Church, but that during the latter part of their occupation they were converted to Christianity.

Gress appears to have been an important place in the heyday of Norse settlement and the number of Norse placenames gives an insight into the penetration and strength of their language throughout the area.

One of the intriguing and unanswered questions about Lewis relates to the nature of the language spoken by the inhabitants before the Norse invasions and also when Norse ceased to be the dominant language of the area.

As there is reference to a Norse saint by the name of Olaf, or Olave, in the 11th Century, it is possible that the Chapel at Gress was named after him. Whether or not this particular chapel was built on an old monastic site remains a mystery, but it is possible that there would have been a religious building in the area during, or after, the Columban or St Ninian era.



The excellent state of preservation of the gables of the chapel at Gress would suggest that the building must have undergone some comparatively recent restoration. Above the doorway are the initials IBMK, and the date 1681. Are these the initials of the person who carried out the restoration work and, if so, who was IBMK? I personally remember a grand uncle of mine telling us when we were children that the initials stood for Iain Ban Mac Chonnich. After some historical research, it was discovered that the first tacksmen of Gress under the Mackenzies were the Baynes (Bainich), and the date 1681 corresponds to the period of their tenure. Their tenancy was of very short duration, for we find the Macivers as tacksmen of Gress at the end of the 16th Century.

We have no written evidence that the restoration work of the chapel was carried out by the Baynes, but according to the date and the initials, it is more than likely that the renovation was undertaken by one of them.

The Macivers are buried inside the chapel and a memorial stone has been erected in memory of Lewis Maciver, the last of the line. He died in 1845.

It is worth mentioning one other interesting site at Gress - the farmhouse. Local tradition relates that this house was built on the foundation of a Norse castle known as Caisteal Mor Bhobh (Voe). A short distance from the site there is a slight rise in the ground referred to as Druim Bhobh. The Norse names give ample proof of the Norse influence in the locality.

Should any reader have additional information relating to the contents of this article, Committee Members would be delighted to receive historical material, and every encouragement is given to write to Back Historical Society.





(L-R) Peggy Macleod, Brebhig  
 Mary Macritchie, Vatisker  
 Dollag Stewart, 10 Back  
 Annie Murray, Gress



## LATHA RI DOL CHUN NA AIRIGH (Latha na h-Imrich)

Chaidh an dronnag a sgioblachadh agus an iris a neartachadh, agus an cliabh agus am bach-cliaibh a charadh. Lionadh a chliabh gu na breugain le bunata agus bha fircean air a lionadh le sgadan. Chaidh na bha sin a chuir air druim na banachaige. Chrìoslaich i i fhein le cota drogaid agus osanan, agus be i fhein a bha siubhlach a deanamh a slighe chun an airigh.

A nis, bha imrich fhein aig a bhodach - imideal, agus buarach, agus cruisean, agus prais, agus miosan, agus biadh-meallaidh airson a chruidh, agus druimeag de mhin choirce agus eorna. Thug iad an spreidh a-mach leotha. Na measg bha bo bhainne agus gamhnach agus gamhainn agus laogh og.

An uair a rainig iad a mach bha moran obrach aca ri dheanamh. Bha aca ri fionach a bhuain airson na leapa agus deanamh cinnteach gu robh am bord-slios laidir gu leor airson luchd-laighe a ghiulan. Bha aig a bhodach ri sgrath an fhalais a thionndadh gu taobh na gaoithe, agus caoir thloram a thional airson an teine. Bha aige ri cotan a dheanamh airson a laogh, agus sgrathan tioram fheannadh airson na caillich.

Cha bhitheadh ni a dhith orra air an airigh. Bha bainne agus im agus gruth and barr, aran-eorna, aran-coirce, agus brochan, agus bunata agus sgadan.

Bha pailteas uisge aca 's an loch agus cuairt nan speur aca na thigh-beag.



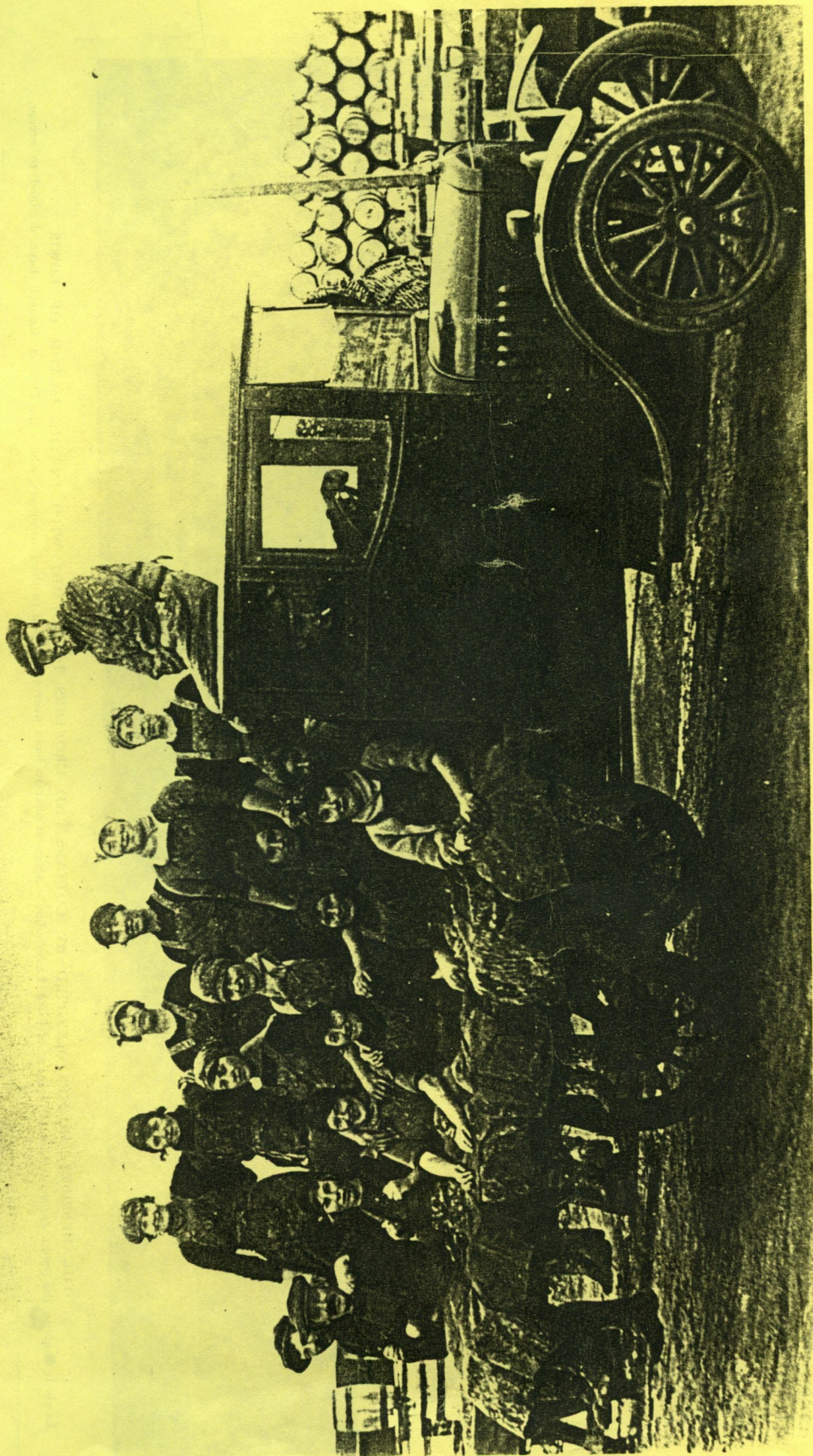
Airidh Broon

Miss Macarthur & Miss Mackenzie, Schoolteachers  
(Cairistiona Aonghais Ruaidh & Iseabal Broon)

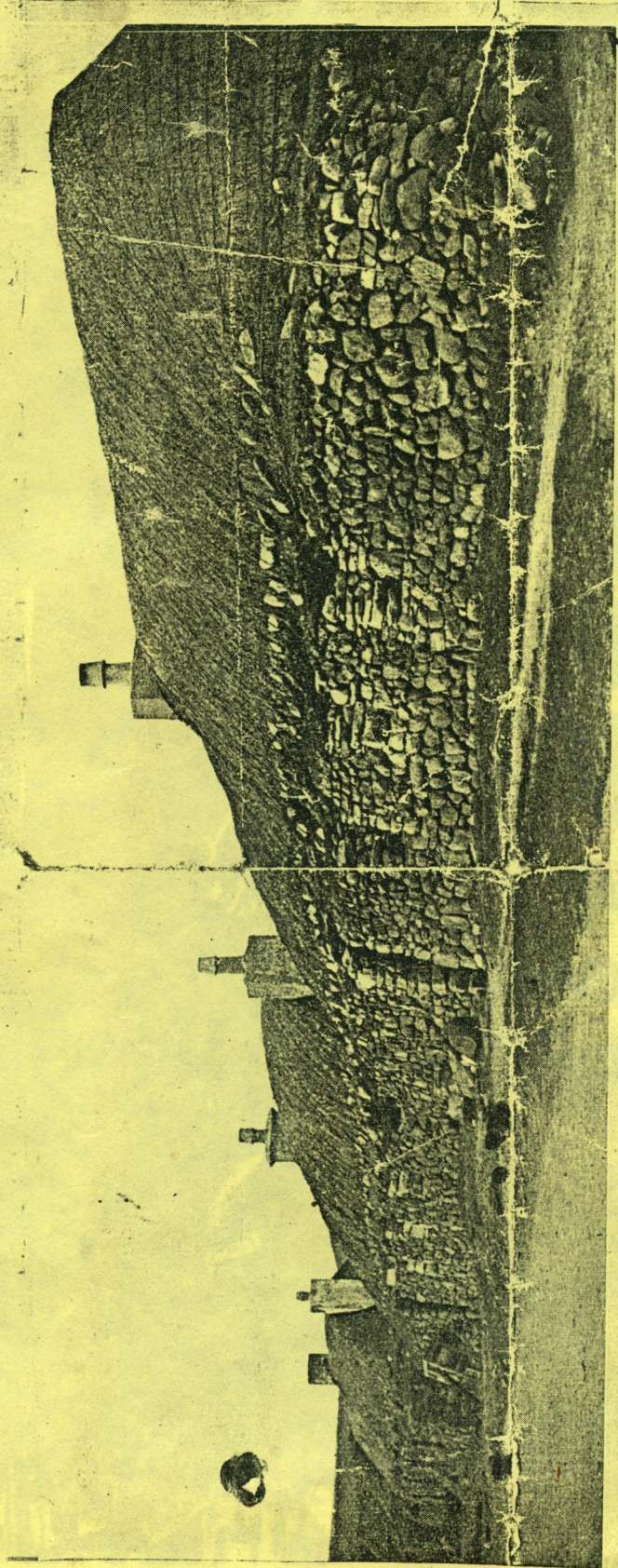












THE HEBRIDES: HOUSES OCCUPIED BY COTTARS AND CROFTERS TO BE MET WITH IN THE ISLAND OF LEWIS  
Lewis is much in the public eye at present on account of Lord Leverhulme's generous offer to hand over the island to the inhabitants, which the District Council have declined to accept.

GOLL CROSS ROADS