

Comunn Eachdraidh

Sgìr' a Bhac

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

LITIR

FIOSRACHADH

AGUS

FAIGHNEACHD

**A MHAIRT**

**1986**

## A' Chairdean

The main reason for our Newsletter is to keep you informed of the work of the Historical Project. We also hope that the historical snippets which are given will be of interest to you and that they might stimulate you into helping the members of the team in their research.

The team is now settled in at the Old Canteen and it has been provided with a full range of facilities to help it to achieve its aim which is to collect as much historical information about the district as is still extant.

We would hope that everybody will participate in this project. Having MSC backing has provided us with a marvellous opportunity to embark on a very worthwhile project which might otherwise have been left undone.

Ma bhitheas sibh faisg air an t-sean chanteen deanamh cinnteach gu'n nochd sibh a steach chum gum faic sibh an obair a tha dol air adhart agus tha mi cinnteach gum bithidh cupan te faisg air laimh cuideachd.



Donald A Stewart  
Sponsor

## HOW WELL DO YOU KNOW THE DISTRICT?

### CAITE AM BHEIL?

Below is a list of various places in our district. How many can you locate? Please turn to page 12 for the answers. We are indebted to Kenneth Murray, 21 Coll, for furnishing some of the older placenames.

1. Feith nan Starrag
2. Bot an De
3. Leig a Bhilich
4. Leig an Thuim
5. An Glodhar
6. Na Creachainn
7. Breacair
8. Druim a Bhac
9. Cnoc an t-Siomann
10. Carolina!!

### DOES ANYONE KNOW HOW THE FOLLOWING PLACES GOT THEIR NAME?

1. An Camach
2. Port Alasdair (Who was this Alasdair?)
3. Cnoc an t-Solais
4. Gearraidh Duthaic (For one explanation for this name see page 19)



FOCAL NO DHA MU THIOMCHUILL CUID DE NA SEAN THEAGHLAICHEAN  
A BHA DEANAMH COMHNUIDH ANN AM BAILE CHUIL  
FAISG AIR DA CHEUD BLIADHNA AIR AIS

About 200 years ago, the village of Coll would have been quite small with the houses huddled close together near the mouth of the Coll River. The village boundaries at this time, and we are indebted to Kenneth MacIver, 33 Coll, for this information, were from "Struthan Mhic 'Ille Chriosdaidh" to "Ceannaich a Chroic" (this is an exceptionally old Gaelic word, first recorded in Perthshire, meaning meadow). Later on, the village moved to what we call "an t-seana baile", for what I feel was rather a short period, before making the final move to the present site.

Until the beginning of the 1660s, Lewis was under the control of the MacLeods and thereafter it was taken over by the MacKenzies from across the Minch. At the time of the MacLeods the original families would have been, besides MacLeods, Nicolson, MacAulays (Uig), and Morrisons (Ness).

When the MacKenzies assumed power, they would have brought across in their wake a whole list of families from the areas of Kintail northwards - amongst which would have been other MacKenzies, MacRaes, Beatons, Mathesons, Finlaysons, and of course the MacIvers.

In the hope of reawakening memories of the history of your own family, particularly as to its origins and any old relationships which were kept; we append brief notes on some of the Coll families of about 200 years ago.

MACLEODS

Since the Island was originally in the hands of the MacLeods we can assume that these are the longest established families.

"Na Barantaich"

A very old family, sometimes appearing in records as MacWarrant' and 'Baron'. Neil, 11 Coll, is the last surviving male member in Coll. A popular family name was Angus.

"Na Banaich"

Another old family, sometimes appearing just as Bain. Norman is a common name.

"Na Ruaidhean"

They are known as the Roy MacLeods and appear as such in the 1700s. A John Roy MacLeod emigrated to America in 1824.

"Na Taillearan"

Some Taillearan in other families came from Kintail. As MacLeods this is unlikely. Donald was a common name.

MACDONALDS

It is quite possible that these families would have come from further south at the time of the MacLeods.

"Na Oigich"

Occasionally a member of this family appears simply as John Og. The site of their old house at the mouth of the river can be pinpointed. John and Angus were family names.

"Na Portairean"

They are noted in 1598 making an attack in a galley with the MacLeods and again in 1662 in Tong. Murdo was in Coll in the middle of the 1700s. Murdo and MacIcolm are two common names. There are no surviving male members of this family in Coll.

STEWARTS

"Na Ruaidhean"  
and "Na 'c Neillean"

These two families are of the same stock. They provide a link with the MacLeods as they came to Lewis about 1540 with Barbara Stewart, wife of Old Rory, the last chief. Family names were George, Donald, Murdo, and David.

MURRAYS

"Na Gobhaichean"

Murrays appear in records as Murrays and occasionally as Morrisons. They are in Coll in the 1700s as Gows but the male lines move away or die out shortly afterwards. Kenneth and Roderick are family names.

GRAHAMS

"Na Ruaidhean"

This is an intriguing family name and I can offer no explanation as to its origin in Coll. It may be that it is an adaptation of a pre-existing name. It certainly is an old established name appearing in records in 1718. Common names are Alasdair and Donald.

BEATONS

"Na Piobairean"

A fairly widespread family in the district at one time. Duncan Piper was in Coll in the late 1700s. Another family whose name is being lost in the village.

FINLAYSONS

"Clann 'ic Fhionnlaidh"

Iain Mhic Sheumais was probably the first member to come to Coll. Later descendants dispersed to Tong, Tolsta and Ness. No surviving male members live in the village. A characteristic name was James.

MACAULAYS

"Na 'c Amhlaidhean"

They appear in Coll at least in the late 1700s, possibly from the Uig area. Murdoch MacAulay in the late 1700s was a weaver. Murdo has always been a popular name.

MACKENZIES

"Clann 'ic Choinnich"

Although they were never very numerous, they are long established in Coll. John MacKenzie is noted in Easter Coll in 1718. John is one of the more common names.



## MACIVERS

This is one of the more difficult families to separate out mainly because there were so many of them and it could be that some of them are from the same stock. It may also be that some members of this family followed the MacIver tacksman to the area from Carloway when he replaced the Morrisons as farmers at Upper Coll. Two of the families are -

### "Na Saighdearan"

This was the name assumed by the descendants of "An Saighdear", John MacIver, born about 1759. The MacIvers, originally of 23 Coll, had a common ancestor. Family names were John and Alasdair.

### "Muinntir 'an 'ic Iomhair"

This family came down to Coll from the Gearraidh Ghuirm area at the end of the 1700s. As there were five brothers, four of them marrying in the area, the descendants became quite numerous. Kenneth is a very common name.

## AIREAMH SHLUAIGH 'S AN SGIRE ANN AN 1835

	<u>Over 14 years</u>	<u>Total</u>
GRIAIS	28	29
AM BAC	205	303
BHATASGEIR	130	208
COL IARACH	169	263
COL UARACH	18	21
GEARRAIDH GHUIRM	42	83

The village of Gress by this time would have been cleared of its people. This would account for the lack of children as the population would be made up of older workers at the farm and the mill. Workers at the fishing station might well have boosted the numbers.

Back and Coll would have moved to their present sites and the statistics reflect a settled community for this time.

The farm at Vatisker would have been broken up and the land has been taken up by locals and incomers from as far away as Harris. The high number of children are indicative of quite a young age group.

The statistics for Upper Coll reflect those of a farm and its workers.

Gearraidh Ghuirm is in the middle of a ten year resettlement. Most of these settlers came from Melbost, Borge and many went back there after the subsequent evictions. Four families, some of them originally from the village, resettled at Coll.

(Contributed by Donald A Stewart, 28 Upper Coll)

## A BHLIADHNA

### SEASONS OF THE YEAR

Kenneth Campbell "Kenny Tweed", Vatisker, has given us a very interesting summary of the year. We would very much like to make up the year in this way so that if you can add to it, we would be grateful. Here we give you the first three months but do not confine yourselves to these. Any information would be helpful.

#### January

The last fortnight of this month was known as "Facilteach a' Gheamhraidh".

#### February

The first fortnight was called "Facilteach an Barraich". The "Facilteach" was regarded as the time when the worst weather was to be expected with cold and gales. It often happened that during this period there would be three fine days which was known as "Tri Latha Ubhar anns an Fhaoilteach". Also during this month occurred what was called "Feill Bhride" (St Brides). The full moon during this month produced a very low tide and was taken advantage of for digging the sands for the shellfish called "muir-sgian". The best place for this was a sandbank called the Reef between the "Dun" and "Port a' Bhata" which became exposed for some hours during the ebb tide.

#### March

During this month fell the festival of "Feill Phadruig" (St Patrick's Day). Another low tide this month was also good for "muir-sgian". These two exceptionally low tides were called "Reothairt Mor Fheill Bhride" and "Reothairt Mor Fheill Phadruig". Also during this month the sheep which had wintered on the moor were taken home.

e.g. This starts with the last fortnight in January. What about "a' Bhliadhna Ur"? How was it celebrated? Any old customs?

### SEAN-FHACAIL AIG A BHEIL CEANGAL RIS AN AITE

Old sayings that have some connection with our district are of particular interest. We would hope that we would be able to collect more of them.

Here is an example from Catherine MacIver "Katag Mhurchaidh", Coll -

"Teichidh fuam Cladach Chroic na h-eich bho ghrod Ghriais".

Hearing the sound of "Cladach Croic", over on the west-side of the Island, was a bad omen for it forebode a period of very stormy weather.

The sound of "Gleann an Arbh" in Coll predicted a similar spell of bad weather.



## BUTH NAN NAOSG

Bha mi aig coinneamh o chionn ghoirid agus chuir mi cheist air na bha lathair gun moran dochas agam gu faighinn freagairt. "Am bheil duine sam bith an seo", ars mise, "a chuala mu ait ann an Col ris an canadh iad "Buth an Naosg"? " 'Se a thug orm a cheist a chuir gu robh "Domhnall Piugh" a Chol-Uarach (an duine as aosda a tha 'san sgìre againn) ag innse dhomh o chionn uine ghoirid air ais, 'nuair a bha e fein og, gu robh seann duine o'n Bhac, "Murchadh Greum", a lorg caora. Thubhairt e ri Domhnall gu robh a chaora aig Buth na Naosg.

Bha "Domhnall Alasdair Dhomhnuill a Charagainn" aig a choinneamh agus fhreagair e mi - "Cha do shaoil mi gu robh an ainm maireann agus tha mi toilichte gu'n cuala mi e air ainmeachadh a ris". Tha e coltach gun d'thainig Domhnall Alasdair tarrsuinn air an ainm seo mar aon de na comharan-crich a bha air tac Chuil-Uaraich anns a bhliadhna 1660. Be seo na crìochan a bha eadar Col agus Col-Uarach, agus 'se seo an doigh anns na sgrìobh iad:-

"Tha a chrìoch am bogha na naosg  
'S ma thairneas tu an taod teann  
Dh'an bhota dhomhain seo thuas  
'S a sin gu Col-Uarach nam beann

'Nuair a chuala mi seo aig Domhnall Alasdair, chuir mi romham gu'n deanainn tuilleadh rannsachadh oir tha an ainm seo coir mor air trì cheud bliadhna dh'aois. Latha neo dha an deigh seo, choinnich mi re Coinneach MhicIomhair, a bha o cheann a muigh Chuil uaireigin, agus chuir mi air a cheist cheudna. "Chuala mise an ainm ceart gu leoir agus 'se "Buth nan Naosg" an doigh air am bitheadh sinn ga ainmeachadh". "Chan eil mi buileach cinnteach c'ait an robh e ach 'sann timchioll Amhuinn Chuil a tha e". Seachduinn an deigh seo thainig "Calum Aonghais na Banntraich" a steach do oifis a phuist, agus a ris chuir mi a cheist airsan. Stad e mionaid bheag. "Tha cuimhne agam gle mhath mar gu b'ann an de a bh'ann air "Calum 'an 'ic Raoghaill" ag innse dhuinn, 's sinn 'nar balaich og, mu thimchioll na seann chrìochan a bha eadar Col agus Col-Uarach, agus seo mar a chuir esan iad - "o Bhot an Phudair gu Clach na h'Ulchinn - o Chlach na h'Ulchinn gu Buth na Naosg - o Buth na Naosg gu Creag Reifainn".

Tha mi a chuir romham gu bheil mi ri dol a leantuinn orm a cheist seo gus am faigh mi a mach le cinnt de an ionad anns an robh "Buth nan Naosg". Tha mi air faighinn "sop as gach seid" o'n uair sin agus tha seann chart-uill agam air son cuideachadh a thabhairt dhomh.

Tha dochas agam mar sin nach bi an uine ro fhada gus an cuir mi mo mheur air an dearbh ait anns am bheil an ionad a tha seo leis an ainm a tha cho fad air ais 'nar eachdraidh. Tha moran g'an eachdraidh air chall ach tha moran air fhagail cuideachd agus tha sinn an dochas gum faigh an Comunn Eachdraidh air cruinneachadh math a dheanamh, thall 'sa bhos, air feadh na sgìre. Gu math a theid dhaibh.

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Tha sinn duilich gu'n do chaochail "Domhnall Piugh" o'n deach seo a sgrìobhadh.

Chaochail e air an aon latha fichead de'n Ghearran aig aois ceithir fichead agus ceithir bliadhna deug.

(Contributed by Murdo MacDonald "Moley", Back Post Office)

Here is a competition for our younger readers. Hidden in this square are the names of seven places in the district. They may read across, up and down, diagonally, or backwards, and to add a little more interest, some are in Gaelic and some are in English.

B	R	E	V	I	G	R	E	C	S
A	H	B	A	N	R	B	A	O	C
V	A	A	T	N	A	P	S	O	D
B	C	D	T	B	K	O	L	L	R
B	A	M	B	A	C	L	A	K	C
A	M	T	A	B	S	Y	G	R	G
L	A	C	L	T	M	G	R	T	V
G	R	I	A	I	S	O	E	H	A
G	H	E	I	S	A	N	C	I	T
L	L	I	H	T	H	G	I	L	R

The winners of the first three correct solutions drawn from the hat will receive a book token value £2.00.

Age Limit - 14 years and under

DON'T ASK YOUR PARENTS TO HELP BECAUSE THEY WILL ONLY CONFUSE YOU!!

Write your solution along with your name and address on a piece of paper and bring to school on or before 20th March when we shall collect.



### GRESS PUPILS ON STRIKE (OR WAS IT PARENTS?)

In November 1925, the first of two strikes organised by Gress parents took place when in this newly formed village parents withdrew their children from Back School and demanded a school of their own. The children were with-held from school from 2nd November till 25th November, as retold in the 1965 Eilean an Fhraoich Annual.

The new village of Gress was in rebellion because the children had to go to Back School. The headmaster, the late Mr W. G. Morrison, supported them. On Christmas Day, he said a good many of the children had ventured out, but were caught in a wild shower before they reached school. They arrived in a pitiable condition, dripping wet, with the water squelching out of their boots. Two of them had since been off school with rheumatic fever.

The question which will spring to most minds today is, what were they doing in school on Christmas Day anyway? But no one thought it odd in 1925 that the Christmas holidays should not begin until Christmas Day was safely past.

The School Management Committee's problem was whether to go for a side school at Gress or a charabanc. Does anyone nowadays call a bus a charabanc? In the event they got neither and the problem of getting the Gress children to school remained unsolved until comparatively recent times.

Ten years later in January 1935, the Gress parents kept their children from school from 11th January until 4th February. A deputation of Gress parents appeared before a meeting of the School Management Committee asking for the erection of a school at Gress. The deputation, although strongly urged to send their children to school in the meantime, declined to say that they would do so until they consulted other parents in the settlement. It was stated at the meeting that the total number of children, of and under school age, was fully 80, and for this number the committee considered the erection of a school would be an economical proposition.

The County Education Committee decided that, because the distance between Back School and Gress is less than 3 miles, they were unable to erect a school or provide a bus service.

Gress pupils did not start school until they were six years old because of the distance involved - Back pupils went at five.

It has been said that the "Drochaid Dhubh" - a timber structure, black in colour, was provided after this to shorten the distance for the pupils.

(Contributed by John MacLennan, 24 Gress)

### THE MONSTER IN BROAD BAY

Loch Ness is not the only place in Scotland where marine monsters have put in an unexpected appearance, according to the "Morning Post" of March 19, 1880.

"A gigantic monster of the deep, supposed to be a sea serpent, was lately seen off the coast of the Isle of Lewis. It was from sixty to eighty feet in length, and was visible for fourteen days, gambolling in an arm of the sea called Broad Bay. The creature was never observed to spout water, and seemed to have a mane like a horse, only much larger and of a white colour". (From Eilean an Fhraoich Annual 1978).



## BARDACHD

These bardic pieces contributed George Stewart "Seoras Shoyan", 2 Back, were composed by Donald Stewart MacLeod (Quebec Province). Donald was the son of Isabel Stewart (Back), a sister of Murchadh Dhonnchaidh.

We print the first and last verse and chorus -

### MO DHURACHD

Bha mise air tusa mar a bha cach  
Gun diu do chail ach bairnsean  
'Sann bha mi'n dhuil mus tig am bas  
Gu faighinn gras le faighneachd  
Ach sheall an t-ughdair dhomh na gradh  
Gu feumuinn spairn le cuimhneas  
Thaobh goirid uin' nach faodainn tamh  
Gus 'm biodh mo shlaointe cinnteach

Thaobh meud dhaimh ri mac a' ghraidh  
Tha m'anam lan do iondrainn  
Cia'n taobh a theid mi a miosg chaich  
Gus faigh mi fath gu chluinntinn  
Mo run ma gheibh mi E gun dail  
Gu'm gabh E tamh 'nam inntinn  
'S ro mhillis leams an cuireadh blath  
Thug E an gradh do'n aingidh

'Se creideamh dochas agus gradh  
A chaitheadh sgail na h-oidhche  
'Sa chumadh comhnard air an t-sraid  
Gu sion ard an aoidhreacht  
Tha spiorad oirdhearg 'san ail  
A cheannaich bas a Phiolat  
Cha lig E doruinn thuc no plaigh  
'S chan fhaigh am bas na laimh iad.

Another by the same author which runs to 15 verses.

We print the first and last verse -

### IN MEMORY OF NEIL MURRAY (Mother's Nephew)

A' mhuinntir ionmhuinn Mharsboro  
Bha gradhach leam a riamh  
Air leam gu'm chluinn mi'm drasta sibh  
Bhi craiteach mar le pian  
Ri 'g ionndrainn fear a b'abhaist bhi  
Mar bhrathair leibh an Criosd  
Ach thugadh null gu Parras e  
Gu dealradh mar a' ghrian

Chan'eil aon a bhiodh na fhianais  
'Nuair a bhiodh e 'g iarraidh gras  
Nach biodh durachd dha da lionadh  
'S iad a mionachd bhi na ait'  
Chuir e churam air an Trianaid  
Chum a' dhion 's na h-uile cas  
Ann na aoradh thug e fianais  
Gu'm b'e Iosa fear a' ghraidh

In a completely different vein, we give some locally composed verses which we have heard. Can anyone supply the rest of this one or for that matter, other local Bardachd

### TALLA A' BHAC

Thainig thu a Sasuinn  
Breagha, spaideal, ur  
'Null gu ruig thu Airnish  
Air bata mor na smuid  
Chaidh do chuir an arda  
Le luchd-ceard a's saor  
Gu bhith nad' ionad fasgadh  
Dha na fleasgaich bha bho chis

Rann eile dha'n oran -

'Nuair a rainig iad am baile  
Rinn na balaich mar bu choir  
Cursa air tigh Mhic Challum  
Far am beil a mealladh mor  
Ach 'se a thubhairt am BARMAN  
"Cha bhi ceardan an seo ri 'g ol  
Fiachamh MAC'S IMPERIAL  
Far a bheil tuilleadh dha ar seors'

'Se "Shonaidh a' Bhrunaich" nach maireann a sgrìobh oran "Talla a' Bhac".



AM BHEIL FHIOS AIG DUINE?

1. There are traditions, in various parts of the district, for example in Bruthanais (Upper Coll), Gearraidh Ghuirm, Rudha nan Gall (Coll), of graves, usually close to the shoreline. Those who were buried in them vary from "Lochlannaich", "Goill", and "cuirp a thainig air tir". It would be interesting to find out if those sites are more widespread and what the "beul-aithris" surrounding them is.
2. Several members of our community served in the army at the end of the 1700s and the earlier parts of the 1800s. They served in India, Java, Egypt (Cogadh nan Tuirc) and Waterloo (Cogadh Napoleon). It would be interesting to make a full list of those "saighdearan" and to collect any anecdotes about them.
3. Who was the George MacLeod (Coll) who married a Mary Murray (Steinish) in 1823. Thereafter they went to Portvoller and Glen Tolsta before finally settling at 17 Tong. Members of their family who married were, Anne, married to George MacDonald (Old Seoras Portair), 29 and 4 Coll, Kenneth (Coinneach Sheorais), 17 Tong married to Isabella MacKenzie, and Barabel married to Alexander Finlayson, 27 Aird Tong. If any family maintained a relationship with these families we should be able to work out who the George MacLeod was.
4. Where did Clann Mhic 'Ille Chriosdaidh go? In Coll we have a "Struthan Mhic 'Ille Chriosdaidh" and they were in Gearraidh Ghuirm in the late 1700s as Christie. On the mainland the name continued as "Gilchrist" or "Christie" but in this area they seem to have disappeared. Does anyone know whether they assumed another surname?
5. Part of the wall between the Coll and Vatisker grazings in the vicinity of "An Iallach" is known as "Garadh Thomais". Who was this Tomas who merited a wall to be named after him?
6. Sometimes on the moor, often not too great a distance from the village, one comes across a more substantial ruin. These are ruins obviously not those of seasonal sheilings since often there is evidence of substantial agricultural activity. "Feannagan" associated with the "talamh taomaidh" have been carefully and laboriously set out close to the ruins. Examples of those "airidhean" are "Tigh Thaiseadar" and "Airidh Ghlas" in Upper Coll and "Airidh Bharaiseadar" near the Coll and Vatisker boundary. Can anybody shed any light on those ruins?
7. There is a long tradition of stills at Coll and Vatisker. Where were they? Who owned them? When did they exist? What stories have you heard about them?
8. The Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge had a school at "Nether Coll" around 1740. Mr Angus MacLeod, Edinburgh Gaelic Schools Society came to Gress in 1813 (district of Gress - ie Tong to Tolsta - or village of Gress?) because a schoolhouse was ready for him. Where was this schoolhouse? Two known sites of schools are - one at present 53 Vatisker and one at Reay Cottage. What have you heard of these schools? When were they there?
9. There is evidence of old dwellings on the "Cnoc Buidhe in Gress". Does anyone know who lived here and when?
10. Who were "Clann 'ic Iomhair nam Muc"? This was a fairly common term at one time to identify one of the branches of the MacIvers. Unfortunately we are unable to find anyone who remembers which branch. Can you help?



SEAN BHALLA A THAING RIS AIR A MHOL MHOR

There can be little doubt that the Viking settlement of Lewis was extensive. It has been estimated that well over 90% of village placenames in the Island can be attributed to them.

The Vikings ruled in Lewis for about 500 years and yet there have been few, if any, of the remains of their homesteads identified with any certainty.

Could there be even a remote possibility that the wall recently uncovered by the sea on the Mol Mor is a Viking house? Positive identification must of course be left in the hands of the trained archaeologist but should any artefacts attributable to the Viking era be found, in situ, in the vicinity of the ruins it would certainly strengthen the case.

John Barber in his book "Innsegall" writes that "once abandoned these houses rapidly decay to leave simple rectangular mounds in which, at best, only the outline of the outer wall remains visible. In this state they are not really distinguishable from the very numerous remains of blackhouses deserted or abandoned within the last two centuries".

An examination of the placenames of the area certainly indicates that it was a popular location for Vikings. There are numerous names of Norse derivation. Brevig is probably the most obvious one, Old Norse, breidh - broad and vig - bay. Vatisker we are informed is not from Old Norse, vat - fresh water but from batr - boat. Sker is big rock. This word in all probability refers to the Sgeir Mhor to which the boats would be moored, whilst the tide was rising, prior to them being pulled up on the Mol Mor. Nearby is Sgeir Lis. Lis is from the Old Norse, Ljoss - a light to guide the boats in at night-time. Presumably then, the Mol Mor was of sufficient importance to the Vikings at that time as to merit some form of light on Sgeir Lis to help with the night-time navigation. This would not be indicative of intermittent usage but would point towards a more permanent settlement.

Perhaps the most interesting of all the Viking names in the vicinity of the ruined wall is Loch na Mial. Although tradition has it that this is the Loch of the Mill, the name comes, not from the Gaelic Loch na Muilne, but from the much older Old Norse, mylann - a grinding mill. This type of mill would be the Norse horizontal mill used in some parts of Lewis within the last hundred years. It used less water for powering it than the later mills and Loch na Mial would have had a sufficient water catchment area.

A grinding mill would indicate a settled community with a fairly extensive system of agriculture. Together with the use that was being made of the port facilities there is every reason to expect a sizeable village at this location. As the site of these villages is normally adjacent to the port, traditionally looking towards the sea, it is not unreasonable to suggest that an old village once occupied this site.

MacKenzie, in his map of the area in 1750, has identified the villages of Gearraidh Ghuirm, Coll, Back, and Gress. For each of them he has allocated a little symbol to indicate the precise site. Unfortunately, although he has named Wat Skir on his map, he has failed to give it a symbol. Whether this was intentional or not we shall never know. If he had attributed a symbol to Vatisker, if it existed as an established village as distinct from the farm and its associated settlement, we would have known the precise site and found whether or not it did coincide with the ruin site. Vatisker itself would seem to have been run as a farm, latterly by Kenneth Morrison, until at least 1807 and this might have precluded the growth of a sizeable settlement.



Until, as I said, an expert examines the site we can only surmise but until then the strong temptation must remain to equate our ruin with that of a Viking longhouse which could be over a thousand years of age. As Barber in his book points out, "the solution to the problem of the absence of Viking settlement may therefore be that we are not seeing them in the midst of the abundant remains of similar, but much later, structures". (Old Norse Derivations - "Place Names of Lewis and Harris", D MacIver)

(Contributed by Donald A Stewart, 28 Upper Coll)

#### GARADH DRUIM BRAIGH AN UILLT (Allt Cro Giga)

This wall is one of many to be seen on the fringes of villages in the Back district and no doubt many of them have an interesting history. The purpose of most of them is self-evident as boundary walls to keep stock off the village, away from the growing crops. This one, however, is different in that it runs at right angles to the village boundary walls such as the "Garadh Dubh" and the "Garadh Glas".

It starts at "Gearradh Duthac" in Gress and goes straight out to the moor for approximately one mile and comes to an abrupt end. Why was it built and why does it come to an abrupt end? We would like to suggest a theory as to why it was built and support it with some slender evidence.

When the MacIvers came to Gress at the end of the 17th Century, the Morrisons were the tacksmen there and they stayed on for some time after the arrival of the MacIvers. On one side of the wall we have "Beinn Chaillein" and on the other side "Beinn Iomhair". It is easy to associate "Beinn Iomhair" with the MacIvers and what would be more appropriate than to associate "Beinn Chaillein" with the Morrisons with whom Colin was such a popular family name? So, did the Morrisons and MacIvers build this as a boundary wall between them some three hundred years ago?

Tradition tells us why the building of the wall came to such an abrupt end. On one occasion, when the work was in progress, about mid-day, darkness fell and the superstitious workers panicked believing that it was a judgement on them for maybe disturbing remains of a person or persons buried in the area and they refused to do any more work and so the wall progressed no further. No such panic would concern us today because, in our "enlightened" times, we would know that the darkness was simply a total eclipse of the sun. This is why it is popularly known as "Garadh Meadhon Oidhche".

(Contributed by George Stewart "Seoras Shoyan", 2 Back)

#### ANSWERS FROM PAGE 1

1. The old name for Allt Kate below Uilleam Shandy's house
2. The old name for Leig Chaluim Tharmoid below 16 Coll
3. Present day Vatisker Park
4. Between No. 7 and No. 10 Coll
5. Centre of Back village
6. East end of Gress
7. From west end of Gress village down to Gress River
8. The area round tigh "a Captain" or Quebec, Canada!!
9. Far end of Outend Coll
10. Catherine Hill

### HOW THINGS HAVE CHANGED?

THE SCHOOL (from school records)

1986  
Comments

1879 Feb 28th

Arithmetic (Notation & Numeration) in Standards first and second feeble progress; writing on slates satisfactory improvement. Reading in Standard third moderate progress, Writing & Arithmetic in same Standards fair. Reading & Arithmetic in Standard fourth stiff, Writing, History & Grammar fair.

) Computer long  
) way off!

1886 Jan 22nd

No attendance this week. On enquiry being made of parents as to the absence of their children from School, the cause assigned by them for keeping their children at home is that Hooping Cough is now general over the district. (note spelling)

) Is your child  
) immunised?

Mar 12th

School re-opened on Monday 8th. Attendance unsatisfactory. Lessons given according to Time Table.

1896 Feb 28th

No openings made today owing to stormy weather. Very few pupils were able to come to school.

}  
 }  
 }  
 }  
 }  
 }  
 }  
 }

1906 Jan 31st

Owing to the storm 79 scholars appeared and consequently I could not mark the registers.

Feb 12th

) Has the weather  
) changed any?

The storm still rages - 75 scholars appeared this morning = 23% and consequently the registers were not marked. These stoppages greatly injure the work of the school. All the staff present except Dolina MacArthur (m) sick.

} ?

1916 Feb 11th

Snowy and stormy weather spoiled the attendance this week, the average being 30.5%.



Feb 23rd

Visited school - signed Registers which was proved correct. All staff present.

)  
) ?

1926 Feb 26th

The attendance is considerably lower this week, especially in the Infant Department. This is due to an outbreak of colds among the children. The percentage for the week is 86.7%, the lowest for a considerable period. The headmaster was absent on Thursday and Friday.

) Colds!  
) nothing new

1936 Feb 7th

The attendance is very low. On a roll of 241 the percentage for the week was only 81.5%. There are several cases of mumps reported in the district and two cases of Whooping Cough. Several pupils are absent with colds and sore throats. One girl from the advanced division has been granted exemption from further attendance by the School Management Committee. Teachers are all on duty and C.O. visited as usual.

) Teacher's  
) spelling improved

Feb 14th

Some improvement in the attendance is to be noted this week; but it is still very low. Numerous cases of illness among pupils militate against good attendance. There are no further cases of mumps but Whooping Cough seems to be spreading. Our percentage for the week was 85.4%. Teachers are all on duty and the C.O. continues to give careful attention to his work.

)  
) ?

1986 Feb (not from official records)

Fifty years on! School closed due to teachers strike!!

### EILTHIREACHD

Am measg an fheadhain a dhean imrich bho Steornabhagh dìreach gu Philadelphia air bord an long "Friendship" anns a bhliadhna 1774 bha -

Donnachadh MacIomhair (aois 28), a bhean Mairead - a Col  
Donnachadh MacCoinnich (aois 16) - a Col  
Aonghas MacIomhair (aois 17) - bho'n a Bhac

(Contributed by Donald A Stewart, 28 Upper Coll)

## PAST GENERATIONS

### This Should Bring Some Thoughts To Mind

In 1943 when Mrs Isabella MacLeod celebrated her 104th birthday, a New York newspaper reported that she was the oldest person known whose birth-date could be authenticated from records. When she died in 1946 this is how the Stornoway Gazette reported her passing.

Lewis people all over the world will regret the passing of Isabella MacLeod, 13 Vatisker, the grand old lady of Lewis, who had attained the quite remarkable age of 107 years and 6 months. Her age is authenticated by the baptismal records.

She was born in North Tolsta, in the year that Queen Victoria came to the throne, and her long span of life covered many striking events in the outside world.

Lewismen of her generation fought in the Crimea and helped to put down the Indian Mutiny, and she must have known in her youth, some of the veterans who marched with Wellington or sailed with Nelson.

She saw great changes in Lewis. It was round about her first birthday that the Atlantic was crossed for the first time entirely by steam, but she lived to see (or at any rate to hear, for her sight was failing latterly) armadas of aircraft landing at Stornoway en route from America to the battlefields of Europe.

In 1837 the Clearances were still in progress and there was famine that year in the Highlands, but Mrs MacLeod enjoyed the security of the Crofters' Act for more than half her lifetime, she drew the Old Age Pension for 37 years, and lived to hear the name of Beveridge!

Now that Mrs MacLeod has completed her long pilgrimage, the oldest inhabitant of the Island is a sprightly chicken of 104 - another MacLeod, Mrs Margaret MacLeod of Rodil, who is still alert and active.

On the left - Mrs MacLeod  
at 107 years of age



On the right - a previous  
generation

Mary Finlayson (1814 - 1887),  
wife of Murdo Stewart  
"Murchadh Og Mhurch 'c Neill",  
26 Coll

This photo is a copy of an  
oil painting sent by Mary  
Finlayson's granddaughter  
from Idaho, USA, to Isabel  
Smith, widow of the late  
Rev Murdo Murray





## TINNEAS RIS AN CAINNTE "AN AR"

Mrs Mairi MacDonald "Bean Mhic Cuddy" of 17 Coll was reputed to have inherited healing powers for this illness or she may have learned the cure from her forebears and was recognised as having the ability to cure Tinneas an Ar.

This is the way Mrs Dolina Morrison of 39 Coll recollected her story - She experienced this illness and had a large carbuncle on the back of her neck. Mrs MacDonald came especially from her sheiling on the moor to attend to Mrs Morrison when she was a young lass. She had to fast for three mornings and had not to speak to anyone on her way to Mrs MacDonald's house. She then had the affected area massaged by Mrs MacDonald, placing her hand in a basin of water which contained a small piece of money. This took place on three consecutive mornings. Whilst carrying out the treatment, she quoted some poetry. Dolina was then allowed breakfast after each treatment. Following the completion of the course, she was cured.

(Contributed by Mrs Dolina Morrison, 26 Nicolson Road, Stornoway and formerly of 39 Coll)

These were some of the other illnesses and we would like to know about the cures -

A Mam, Tinneas a Righ, Teana De, An Tinneas Air Ais

## CUNGAIDHEAN LEIGHIS

"An nis am measg nan lus eile a bhitheadh iad a cleachdadh, bhitheadh Tormod 'an Saighdear a deanamh feum de'n lus ris an canadh iad Lus Chu Chullain. Gheibheir an lus seo air a mhachair no anns an talamh ghainmheich agus bhitheadh Tormod a deanamh cunghaidh dhith. Bhitheadh e an uairsin 'na thoirt do bheathaichean air an robh glasadh-uisge airson cobhair a dheanamh orra".

(Contributed by Katie Bell (MacDonald) Stewart, 29 Coll)

## **TORMOD AN SAIDHDEAR**

**The Coll Bonesetter**



Norman MacIver, 32 Coll, "Tormod 'an Saighdear" was well known as "Bodach nan Cnamh" throughout the whole Island. Most of the older people would have come into contact with him at some time or other. We would appreciate hearing any story about Tormod.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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A.J. MacRitchie, 16 Vatisker  
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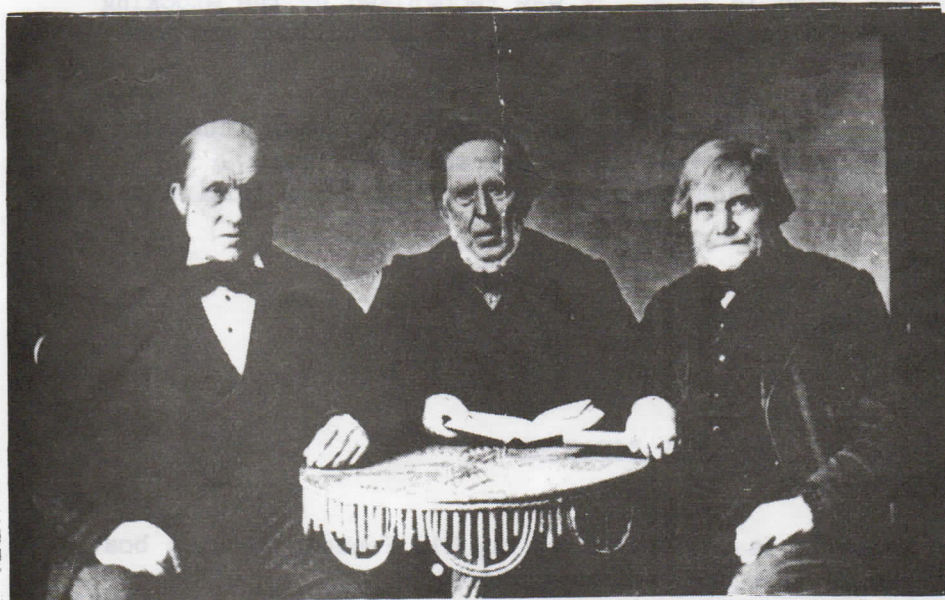
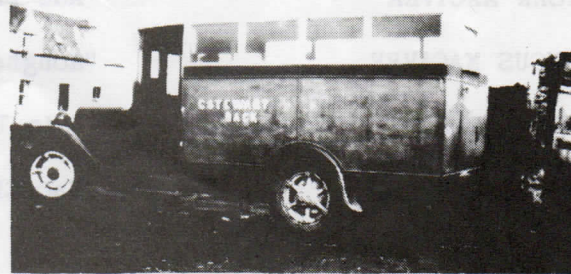




(Above)  
Rev Alasdair MacLeod  
Back Free Church (Left seated)



(Above L - R) Mary MacAulay (MacLeod)  
"Mairi Dhomhnuill Bil",  
Margaret MacDonald "Mairead Hector",  
Mary Murray "Mairi (Stand)  
Choinnich Mhurchaidh Choinnich"



(Above)  
Taken about 1928  
Body built by  
"Alex John  
Dhomhnuill  
Dholly", Outend  
Coll, on a Dodge  
Chassis

(L - R)  
Murdo Stewart  
"Murchadh  
Dhonnachaidh",  
the well- known  
Back Catechist,  
Donald Morrison  
"Domhnall Mac  
Dhughail", Ness  
John MacDonald  
"an Buidhe",  
Tolsta



## DISASTERS

In a community so dependent on the sea for a livelihood, tragedy was no stranger to the area and the drowning of 1894 still brings a sense of shock to anyone reading or hearing about it. We leave that story for another time. Among other disasters there was one in the village of Coll at the beginning of that same year.

## BATHADH CHUIL

Those drowned on this occasion were -

ALLAN MACIVER	"Ailean Mhurchaidh Bhain", 40 Coll Father of "Murchadh Allan", the former postman, from Coll.
JAMES BEATON	"Seumas Alasdair", 40 Coll (37 Coll) Married to Allan MacIver's sister
MURDO MACIVER	Father of Murdo MacIver "Sgaosaidh", 31 Coll
JOHN MACIVER	"Mac Dhomhnuill Bhain", 36 Coll
ANGUS MACIVER	"Aonghas Choinnich Bhig", 38 Coll
JOHN GRAHAM	"Iain Thormoid Dhomhnuill 'an 'ic Iain, 39 Coll
ANGUS MACIVER	"Mac Choinnich an t-Struan", 59 Coll

The body of James Beaton came ashore at Wick. A seaboot belonging to John MacIver "Iain Dhomhnuill Bhain", was found in Tong. It was recognised by the stocking inside it. There is a rather poignant story regarding this incident and was recounted to us as follows -

"Nuair a bha "Seumas Alasdair" a' falbh a Nis airson an eathar seo, thubhairt a mhathair ris, "Tha thu a' dol a dh'iarraidh do cheann-crioch". 'Nuair a' dh'fhaighnich e dhi de bha i a ciallachadh, thubhairt i, "Tha mi a' faicinn calaman air do ghualainn".

(Contributed by Angusina Beaton, 38 Coll)

## ANOTHER DISASTER

Neil Murray, 52 Vatisker, recalls Isabel Gobha telling Old Kennedy about a boat which left Back with a crew of 7 to buy a boat in Ness -

"Cha dh'fhuaradh bioran riamh dhith".

When did this incident occur and who were involved?

## SEANN AITHRIS

Toimhseachan Beag Bho "Seoras Shoyan"

Many of our old sayings contain old or obsolete words and these sayings are often set down so that their meaning is not clear on first hearing them.

"Cha do bhasaich each cileach a riamh le sean aois". )

What does this mean?

("A piebald horse never dies of old age")

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}      (see * below)

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GEARRADH DUTHAC IN GRESS (From Page 1)

In 1282, William, the Earl of Ross received a crown grant of the Hebrides and this made them part of the Earldom Of Ross.

In 1305 - 1306, the Earl violated the sanctuary of "St Duthac" at Tain by seizing the wife of Robert the Bruce and delivering her to the English.

There is no record of the above "St Duthac" after this. He may have visited Lewis, hence the "Gearradh Duthac" in Gress.

## SGEULACHD BHEAG NEO DHA

Bha an comhnuidh daoine ann aig an robh freagairt gle 'aisg agus tha sgeulachdan mun deidhinn gle chumant' anns a coimhearsnachd. Seo te neo dha a chuala sinn agus tha sinn an dòchas a chordas ribh agus a bheir feadhainn eile 'nar cuimhne.

Bha duine araid aon latha cuir lusan mar chail agus 'neip 'nuair a thainig Maighstear MacCoinnich, am ministear, timchioll. "De", ars am ministear, "a tha sibh a deanamh?". "Nach eile sibh a faicinn", a mhinistear", ars esan, "gu bheil mi a cuir siol". "Na'm e mise Dia", ars am ministear, "cha'n fhasadh aon dhiubh". Fhreagair am fear cuireachd, "Sin, a mhinistear, an t-eadarhealachadh eadar Dia agus duine".

Bha da bhrathair 'san sgìre ris an canadh iad Braoididh agus Am Bideanach. Aon bhliadhna an deidh droch Fhoghair thug Am Bideanach siol-coirce dhachaidh bho Thir-Mor ach chuir Braoididh an t-siol aige fhein. An deidh seachdainn neo dha, 'nuair a bhitheadh an dithis suas agus sìos a lot, bha fochann breagha an am feannag Braoididh agus cha robh gasan ri fhaicinn ann an feannag Am Bideanach. Cha d'thubhairt fear seach fear focal airson latha neo dha ach mu dheireadh, thubhairt Am Bideanach, "'Nuill de as coireach nach eile an coirc a thug mise dhachaidh a fas". "'S doch", ars Braoididh, "gur e an cianalas a th'air".

## JUDICIAL RENTAL 1718

Amongst the names appearing for our area are the following -

Kenneth Fraser - Wat Skir, John MacKenzie - Easter Coll, Angus MacGillchallum - Back, Muldonich Keard - Back, Donald McOilvicneillvicintagart - Back.

\*The each cileach was a piebald or spotted horse. It was said that with increasing old age these spots tended to disappear and that a more general grey "glas" colour was assumed



# A TEASER FOR KEEN GENEALOGISTS

## SINNSEAREACHD

Bill Lawson has provided the following outline of a family tree of somebody living in the Back area. He has provided the surnames of all the person's great great grandparents, who were born about 1800, together with one or two other clues. Keen genealogists should be able to work out who the unknown person is - we hope!!

(Great Great Grandparents)

