

Sample Pages

Here are some sample pages of text, photographs and music from the book, Coille an Fhàsaich.

It is intended simply to give you an impression of the style of the book.

I hope you like it.

Kevin Bree
3rd November 2008
07947460176



Brìgh



Gach dealbh anns an leabhar seo © Kevin Bree ach nuair a chanar a chaochladh

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Coille an Fhàsaich

the Gaelic songs and poems of Donald MacKillop

Dòmhnall MacPhilip

edited and translated by Anne Lorne Gillies

Brìgh

Do mo bhean ionmhainn, Catrìona

ris an do choinnich mi nam òige agus a lorg mi a-rithist an dèidh iomadh bliadhna
nuair a bha an dithis againn nar bantraichean

*Mo chaileag bhòidheach à Bail' a' Chaolais,
Ged as òg thu, gu bheil mo ghaol ort:
Do shùilean blàth is do nàdar coibhneil
Tighinn dlùth air m' aigne gach là is oidhche.*

For my beloved wife, Catherine

whom I met in my youth and found again many years later
when we were both widowed

My lovely girl from Ballachulish,
Though you're so young, I'm in love with you:
Your warm eyes and your kind heart
Pervade my thoughts by day and by night.

Facal-tòiseachaidh

Tha e air a bhith na thoil-inntinn dhomh fhìn agus do Chaoimhean Bree, an duine agam, co-chruinneachadh Dhòmhnail MhicPhilip a chur ri chèile. Caoimhean a’ dealbhachadh an leabhair: na dealbhan – cuid mhath dhiubh a thog e fhèin ann an Gleanna Comhann, am Beàrnaraigh agus san Eilean Sgitheanach, feadhainn eile a fhuair e bho dhiofar dhaoine coibhneil, gu h-àraidh bhon tasglann aig Comann Eachdraidh Bheàrnaraigh – agus cruth an leabhair air fad.

Mi fhìn a’ feuchainn ris an ceòl a sgrìobhadh sìos gu fìrinneach, le taic o Iseabail T NicDhòmhnail; notaichean meadhanach ciallach a chladhach a-mach às na mìltean de bheachdan ’s de mheòhrachan a th’ aig Dòmhnall còir (le cuideachadh bho ghrunn dhaoine, gu h-àraidh Pheigi, nighean a’ bhàird, agus Iain MacDhòmhnail); rian a chumail air fad an leabhair – rud nach eil air a bhith idir furasta le bàrdachd cho inntinneach agus bodach (gabh mo leisgeul, a Dhòmhnail, ach tha thu a-nis barrachd air ceithir fichead bliadhna a dh’aois, a bhalaich, ge b’ oil leat!) cho math air sgeulachdan innse; agus rian a chumail air Catrìona, a bhean, a chuireadh às dhut buileach le bèicearachd mhath Earra-Ghàidheal nam faigheadh i cothrom; agus obair Dhòmhnail eadar-theangachadh gu Beurla: rud a tha do-dhèanta – co-dhiù san dòigh a luthaigeadh tu – is cànan agus beachdan, feallsanachd is gnàthasan-cainnt a’ bhàird cho fìor Ghàidhealach, agus a bhàrdachd cho pongail, làn brìgh agus àbhachdais ann an Gàidhlig, a tha cho mòr air chall ann am Beurla chruaidh.

Tha a’ chuid as motha de bhàrdachd Dhòmhnail ag èirigh às an eòlas fharsaing aige fhèin, bho chladaichean nan Eileanan Siar gu sràidean glasa a’ bhaile mhòir, mar a gheibh sibh a-mach le bhith a’ leughadh ‘Sùil air ais’ – an cunntas ùidheil a thug Dòmhnall seachad air a bheatha fhèin, gu h-àraidh air òige ann am Beàrnaraigh na Hearadh: tha Dòmhnall (agus mi fhìn) a’ smaoinreachadh gu bheil an cunntas seo a cheart cho cudromach ris a’ bhàrdachd fhèin, agus abair gur e naidheachd tharraingeach, làn beòil-aithris a th’ ann. (Mise a thuir sin!)

A thaobh òrdugh nan dàn, chuir mi ‘Coille an Fhàsaich’ (an t-òran as ainmeile aige) aig toiseach an leabhair – mar gun tòisichheadh tu cèilidh le òran eòlach, làidir – agus an uair sin ‘Gràdh dùthcha’ airson muinntir Bheàrnaraigh a chumail rèidh: chì sibh carson nuair a leughas sibh e. Às dèidh sin chuir mi a’ bhàrdachd air dòigh (cho math ’s a b’ urrainn dhomh) a rèir an òrduigh san do thachair gnothaichean ann am beatha a’ bhàird. Chan urrainn dhomh a ràdh le cinnt gur e sin an dearbh òrdugh san deach gach dàn a dhèanamh, ge-tà, oir chan eil fhios agamsa agus chan eil cuimhn’ aigesan!

Tha fuinn Dhòmhnail ainmeil airson cho ceòlmhor, binn 's a tha iad: tha am bàrd na shàr sheinneadair, agus cluichidh e a' phìob agus an fheadag ged nach leugh no nach sgrìobh e ceòl. Chuir mi romham an ceòl a chur ri chèile ann an earrainn fa-leth, às dèidh na bàrdachd. Bha dà adhbhar agam: Caoimhean a chumail rèidh (dreach sgiobalta a chur air an leabhar, mar gum b' e – rud a tha èibhinn dhòmhsa, nam faiceadh tu an rum-obrach aigesan!) agus on a tha mi fhìn a' smaoineachadh gum bu chòir gach òran a bhith air fhaicinn agus air a leughadh, sa chiad dol a mach, mar fhios bàrdachd.

Ach, abair Àirde Mhòr dhan chèilidh phriseil aig Dòmhnall: na fuinn àlainn, eòlach seo a lorg aig deireadh an leabhair. Dìreach mar a tha an leabhar fhèin a' nochdadh – chan ann aig deireadh a' Chèilidh Mhòir aig Dòmhnall fhèin, ach co-dhiù cairteal na h-uarach às dèidh na h-Eadar-ùine! Guma fada a mhaireas an Dàrna Leth. Tha a h-uile duine a th' air a bhith an sàs san leabhar seo a' cur dhùrachdan thuige fhèin 's gu Catriona, agus a' guidhe deagh shlàinte dhaibh! Agus a' toirt mìle taing do Dhòmhnall fhèin airson 'fiacaill a' bhàird' a chur gu feum ann an dòigh cho annasach, ùidheil agus èibhinn.

Bu mhath leam cuideachd taing a thoirt dha na deagh charaidean a leanas airson gach nì a rinn iad dhuinn:

Sue Wilson, Connie Bree, Harry Percival, Ailean Mac an Tuairneir, Bill Innes, Hugh Cheape, An Dr Urr. Ruairidh MacLeòid, Bill Lawson, Iain Murchadh Moireasdan, Dòmhnall Ailig MacPhilip agus Gloria NicPhilip, Fionnlagh agus Mairead Pheatarsan, Linda Gowans, Rebecca Fhearghastan, Isa Nic'Ilip, Stephen Darlington, Mòrag May NicIlleathain, Iain Aonghas MacCumhais, Sìneag NicIlleathain, Andy Rodger agus Comhairle nan Leabhraichean.

An Dr Anna Latharna NicGilliosa
Dùn Lùib, an t-Sultain, 2008

Foreword

It's been a real pleasure for myself and my husband, Kevin Bree, to compile and edit this collection of Donald's work. Kevin designing the book: the photographs – a good number of which he took himself in Glencoe, Berneray and the Isle of Skye, others which he was gifted by various kind people and organisations, especially the Berneray Historical Society – and also the whole shape of the book itself.

Myself doing my best to transcribe the melodies faithfully, with the help of Ishabel T MacDonald; to construct reasonably sensible notes out of Donald's myriad of opinions and memories (with the help of Peigi, the bard's daughter, and Ian MacDonald); to keep control over the length of the book – which has not been easy with such interesting poetry and a bodach (sorry, Donald, but you are now over eighty, my lad, whether you like it or no!) who is such a splendid raconteur; to keep control of Cathy, his wife, who would finish you off completely with good Argyll baking if given half a chance; and to translate Donald's work into English: which is impossible to do – at least the way you would like – when his language and ideas, philosophy and idiom is so totally Gàidhealach, and his poetry so clear-cut, and so full of Gaelic pith and humour, much of which is lost in English.

Most of Donald's poetry arises directly out of his own wide life experience, from the shores of the Western Isles to the grey streets of the big city, as you will discover upon reading 'Looking back' – the interesting account Donald has given of his own life, especially his youth in Berneray Harris: Donald (and I) think this account is every bit as important as the poems themselves: for what a fascinating story it is, full to the brim with traditional lore. (That's me speaking now!)

As regards the order of the poems, I placed 'Coille an Fhàsaich' (his most celebrated song) at the beginning of the book – in the way that one would begin a ceilidh with a strong, familiar song – and then comes 'Patriotism', to please the people of Berneray: you'll see why when you read it. After that I arranged the poems (so far as was possible) according to the order in which things took place in Donald's life. I can't be sure that they were composed in that order, though, because I don't know and he can't remember!

Donald's tunes are famously melodious and sweet: the bard is a super singer, and he can also play the pipes and the whistle, though he doesn't read or write music. I decided to put the melodies all together in a separate section after the poetry. I had two reasons: first to keep Kevin happy (to keep the 'look' of the book tidy, as it were, which is very funny to me, if you could see the state his workroom's in!) and because I personally think all the songs

should be seen and read, for the first time at least, as pieces of poetry.

But what a climax – what a “Big Finish” to Donald’s precious ceilidh: to find these lovely, familiar tunes appearing right at the end of the book.

Just as this book itself is appearing – not at the end of Donald’s own Big Ceilidh, but certainly quarter of an hour after the Interval! Long may the ‘Second Half’ last. All of us who have been involved in the making of this book send our warmest wishes to Donald and Cathy, and wish them both the best of health! And we send a thousand thanks to Donald himself for putting his ‘poet’s tooth’ to such lyrical, fascinating and amusing use.

I would also like to thank the following good friends for everything they’ve done for us:

Sue Wilson, Connie Bree, Harry Percival, Alan Turner, Bill Innes, Hugh Cheape, Rev. Dr Roderick MacLeod, Bill Lawson, John Murdo Morrison, Donald Alick and Gloria MacKillop, Finlay and Margaret Paterson, Linda Gowans, Rebecca Ferguson, Isa MacKillop, Stephen Darlington, Morag May MacLean, John Angus MacCuish, Sìneag MacLean, Andy Rodger and the Gaelic Books Council.

*Dr Anne Lorne Gillies
Dunlop, September 2008*



Far an d' fhuair mi m' àrach òg

Feumaidh mi aideachadh gun do rugadh mi ann an suidheachadh glè fhàbharach, ged a chaochail m' athair mu shia seachdainean mun do rugadh mi. Bha gach goireas againn airson ar feumalachd. Ged a bha an t-airgead gann, bha Beàrnaraigh beairteach, air sgàth toradh an fhuinn agus na mara. 'S ann anns an Fhaoilteach a rugadh mi ann an 1926, a' bhliadhna a bha an stailc mhòr ann am Breatann, ach ged a bha cuid de shluagh nam bailtean mòra ann an droch staing, gheibheadh na h-Eileanaich rudeigin a chuireadh air falbh an t-acras.

'S e tàillear a bha na mo sheanair Uibhisteach, agus nuair nach robh an t-airgead ann bhiodh e gu tric air a phàigheadh le gràn, buntàta, clòimh, snàth, no earras sam bith eile a dhèanadh feum an àite an airgid.

Bha e pòsta aig Anna nighean Tormoid 'icPhàic, no Bhàic, ach le mearachd chaidh an t-ainm sin atharrachadh gu MacPhilip. Chan eil fhios aig duine an-diugh carson. Bhuineadh m' athair dhan chinneadh sin cuideachd, 's e sin seann Chlann MhicPhàic.

Bha mo mhàthair ag innse dhomh gu robh cuimhn' aice, nuair a bha i fhèin glè òg, a bhith a dol seachad mullach Beinn a' Chlaidh air oidhche bhrèagha ghealaich còmhla ri a màthair fhèin, Bean an Tàilleir, le peice de ghràn eòrna airson a bhleith¹. Cha robh brà san àite aig an àm sin ach brà a bh' ann an taigh Uilleim MhicMhaoilein, a bha air taobh thall na beinne. Bha Clann MhicMhaoilein nan ciobairean ann am Borgh mus deachaidh an tac a roinn na ceithir fichead croit ann an 1900. Bha iad cuideachd nan ciobairean ann an Àird Teinnis, ann an Uibhist a Tuath. Bha iasad de bhrà an-asgaidh, agus bha daoine ga cur gu feum glè thrì. Bha deagh rathad air a' chòmhnard gu taigh Uilleim, ach leis na bhiodh de luchd-cèilidh a' tachairt ri chèile air oidhche bhrèagha ghealaich, bhiodh mo sheanmhair, leis a' chabhaig, a' toirt dhaibh 'car mu chnoc'. Ach

¹ Chithear dealbh de mhàthair Dhòmhnail, nuair a bha i na seann aois, air t.d. 45

bha a cèile, an Tàillear, calg-dhìreach an aghaidh sin: bha esan sona gu leòr a' cluich an fheadain agus ag aithris sheann sgeulachdan nuair a bhiodh obair a latha seachad.

Dh'fhaodadh duine leabhar a sgrìobhadh mu Bheàrnaraigh ma chaidh a thogail san eilean, agus tha gu leòr beul-aithris ann fhathast, ach feumaidh mise an cuspair sin fhgail an-dràsta.

Nuair a bha mi mu thrì bliadhna dh'aois agus a' tòiseachadh air mothachadh do rudan a bha a' tachairt mun cuairt dhomh, tha deagh chuimhn' agam air mo leth-bhràthair, Dòmhnall Ailig, a bhith tighinn dhachaigh le eala bhàn a mharbh e gu tubaisteach nuair a thàinig i eadar e 's na geòidh air an robh e a' losgadh. Bha sinn uile duilich, oir thuir iad rium nach robh eun eile cho bòidheach no cho modhail san ealtainn. Mar a chaidh innse dhomh, tha an eala a' cosnadh a lòn gu h-ealanta, gun dragh a chur air creutair beò eile. Tha gu leòr dhiubh air lochan Bheàrnaraigh, agus guma fada a bhitheas. Thug bàs na h-eala buaidh mhòr air m' inntinn, ged nach robh mi ach trì bliadhna, agus tha ùidh agam annta on uair sin.

Ged nach robh e ach mu sheachd bliadhna deug a dh'aois, ghabh Dòmhnall Ailig air fhèin coimhead às dèidh a dhithis bhràithrean agus banntarach athar (is i mo mhàthair an dara bean a bh' aig m' athair). Bha e ri iasgaich agus sealg agus le each is cairt air a' chroit a bha aig bràthair m' athar. Bha dà theaghlach ann an taigh mo sheanar, agus ged a bha e fhèin air caochladh, bha a chlann a' fàs mòr agus an taigh a' fàs beag.



Imrich

Nuair a bha mo leth-bhràthair mu ochd bliadhna deug a dh'aois, rinn e an imrich gu Canada, agus chaidh mo leth-phiuthar do sgoil Chinn a' Ghiùthsaidh. Cha robh obair aig Dòmhnall Ailig ann am Beàrnaraigh freagarrach do bhalach òg. Cha robh athair agus a mhàthair fhèin beò. Reic e eathar-iasgaich athar agus, mar a rinn iomadach òigear eile, chaidh e a-null thairis. An latha a dh'fhàg e, bha sinn ga chaoidh gu mòr, agus gu h-àraid mo bhràthair, a bha bliadhna gu leth na bu shine na mise. An oidhche sin thug esan currac Dhòmhnail Ailig dhan leabaidh leis, ach cha robh sgeul air a' chù aige.

An ceann seachdain fhuair sinn cù bochd Dhòmhnail Ailig air a bhàthadh ann an sgor sa chladach. Dh'fheuch e ri snàmh às dèidh a' bhàt'-aiseig a bha a' giùlain air falbh a mhaighstir, agus thug an sruth buaidh air. Thòisich bròn nam balach às ùr nuair a chunnaic iad an cù bàthte air an robh am bràthair cho gaolach.

Phòs mo bhràthair nighean ghasta ann an Canada. À Leòdhas a bha a h-athair, agus bhiodh ise a' sgrìobhadh thugainn gu tric. Thàinig an nighean aca agus a seanair Leòdhasach a shealltainn oirnn, ach cha tàinig Dòmhnall Ailig fhèin riamh, air sgàth a' chianalais a bhiodh air a' tilleadh air ais do Chanada.



Dealasach ri chèile

Nuair a bhiodh obair an fhoghair seachad, bhiodh na daoine a' toirt dhachaigh na cuid mu dheireadh dhen mhòine, agus bhiodh toiseach a' gheamhraidh ann mus bhiodh na luchdan mu dheireadh a-staigh, gan tarraing le bàtaichean beaga agus sgothan. Na daoine a bha fada on chladach, dh'fheumadh iad a toirt dhachaigh le each is cairt. Tha mi cinnteach gu robh trì cheud luchd mònadh a' tighinn do Bheàrnaraigh gach bliadhna, oir bha mu cheud taigh ann, agus gu leòr a' faighinn trì luchdan. Bha mòran dhaoine ag obair air falbh bhon taigh, agus bha a' chuid a bh' air am fàgail ag obair trang o mhoch gu dubh, mus tigeadh an droch shìde.

Bha a' chlann iad fhèin a' dèanamh an roinn dhen obair, agus mus tigeadh an droch shìde agus an geamhradh cha robh bodach no cailleach no duine eile nach robh dìon air a thaigh le deagh thughadh, is cruach-mhònadh aig ceann an taighe.

Is ann às na h-eileanan a bha ann an Caolas na Hearadh agus Uibhist a bha sinn a' faighinn na mònadh. 'S e crùn a bha mo mhàthair a' pàigheadh air a' pholl-mhònadh dhan oighreachd. Mu thoiseach an t-samhraidh bhiodh a' mhòine a' fàs gann air na bantraichean, agus bhiodh Dòmhnall Beag leis an 'scrap crew' aige – mi fhèin 's mo bhràthair Tormod – a' sgrìobadh nam poll-mònadh aca anns na h-eileanan airson chaoran agus seana mhòine, agus bha na cailleachan taingeil airson sin fhèin.

Bha aona bhanntrach mhòr làidir air a' Phort, Anna Iain Mhòir, agus bhiodh ise a' lìonadh uinneag an t-seòmair-cadail aice le feamainn thioram airson a' gheamhraidh, agus bha sin a' cumail dìon air an uinneig agus cha chluinneadh i stoirmean a' gheamhraidh. 'S e cailleach èibhinn a bh' innte, agus b' e Iain Mòr MacLeòid a h-athair. Bha esan cho làidir ri duine a bha ann am Beàrnaraigh riamh. Bha rèidio aig an fhear a bha an ath dhoras dhi, agus 's e 'crogan a' bhodaich' a bha aice air an *accumulator*. Cha robh i cho fada ceàrr san eadar-theangachadh.

'S e aona tobhta fhada agus aona mhullach a bha air na trì taighean anns an robh i. Bha a dhà dhe na taighean a' fosgladh ris an aghaidh agus doras an treas taigh aig a' chùl. Nuair a bhiodh na taighean seo air an ùr-thughadh, 's iad air an lèanaig ri taobh na mara, 's e sealladh air leth sìtheil a bh' ann. Aig an àm a bha seo, bha daoine a' gabhail uail nan obair. Ged a b' e na cruachan-arbhair, bha iad air an tughadh gu snasail le muran.

Bha Dòmhnall (air an taobh chli) na
b' àirde na Tormod a bhràthair, a bha
ochd mìosa deug na bu shìne

Donald, on the left, was taller than his
brother Norman, who is 18 months older



Taigh a' chìobair am Pabbay
The shepherd's house in Pabbay

© Bill Lawson Publications



Dòmhnall an èideadh a' Chabhlaich
Rìoghail san Dara Cogadh

Donald in his Royal Navy uniform
during WWII



23 Iuchar 1992: an craoladair Norris MacWhirter eadar am bàrd agus Isa Nic'Ilip. Bha làmh aig Dòmhnall ann an càrn a bhith ga chur suas mar chuimhneachan air Gille Mòr na Hearadh, Aonghas MacAsgaill

23rd July 1992: broadcaster Norris MacWhirter between the bard and Isa MacKillop. Donald was instrumental in organising the erection of a cairn to celebrate the famous Giant MacAskill
© Comann Eachdraidh Bheàrnaraigh
© Berneray Historical Society



Deagh charaid a' bhàird, an sgoilear Hùisdean Baran

The bard's good friend, Gaelic scholar Hugh Barron



Gach dealbh air an dà dhuilleig seo
© Dòmhnall MacPhilip ach nuair a
chanar a chaochladh

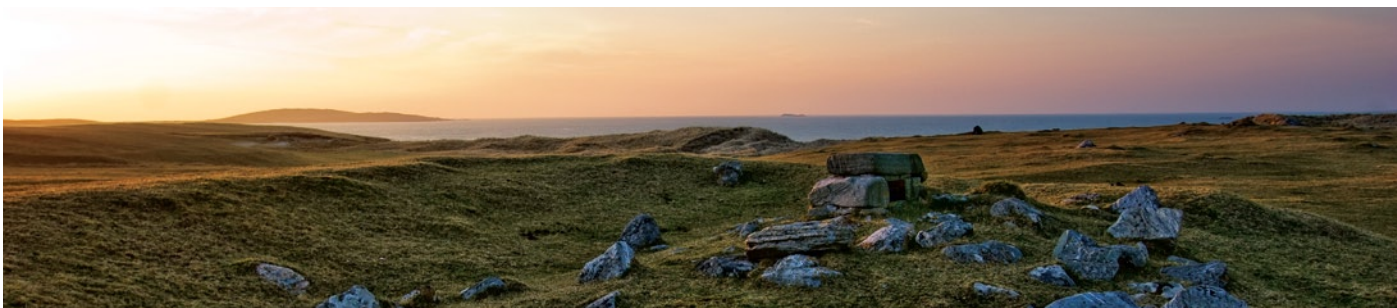
All pictures on this spread
© Donald MacKillop except where
noted

Beinn Dòbhrain, far am b' àbhaist am bàrd
Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir a bhith
na gheamair. Shreap Dòmhnall agus Hùisdean
gu mullach na beinne.

Ben Doran, where the poet Duncan Bàn
MacIntyre was employed as a gamekeeper.
Donald and Hugh climbed to its summit.

© Harry Percival





Where it all began

I can honestly say that I was born into extremely fortunate circumstances, despite my father having died six weeks before my birth. We lacked for nothing. Money might be scarce, but Berneray was rich in produce both from land and sea. I was born in January 1926, the year of the Great Strike in Britain: but while city-dwellers suffered the pangs of poverty the Islanders could always find a way of staving off their hunger.

My Uist grandfather was a tailor, and whenever money was scarce he was paid in kind – grain, potatoes, wool, thread or any other product that could take the place of cash. He was married to Anne, daughter of Norman MacPhàic, or MacBhàic – though this was accidentally changed to MacPhilip or MacKillop: nobody today is quite sure why. My father belonged to the same family – that’s to say, the MacPhàics.

My mother told me that one of her earliest memories was going with her own mother, the tailor’s wife, over the top of Beinn a’ Chlaidh¹ on a lovely moonlit night to grind a peck of barley². At that time the only hand-mill in the island was on the other side of the hill in William MacMillan’s house. These MacMillans had been shepherds in Borve before 1900, when the estate was divided into eighty crofts; they had also been employed as shepherds in Àird Teinnis, in North Uist. They never charged for the loan of their hand-mill and considerable use was made of it. There was a good road over the fields to William’s house and on a lovely moonlit night there were always lots of people going to and fro visiting one another, so my granny – who was always in a hurry – used to try and dodge as many of them as possible. But her husband, the tailor, was completely the opposite: he liked nothing better after his day’s work was done than to congregate with other folk to play the chanter and exchange stories.

1 ‘the Hill of the Graveyard’

2 A photograph of Donald’s mother in old age may be seen on p. 45

(Anyone who was reared in Berneray could write a book about the island. It's so full of tradition: but I'd better not digress too much at this point.)

I have one vivid memory that dates from when I was about three years old and just beginning to take an interest in what was going on around me: my half-brother, Donald Alick, came home with a white swan which he had killed by accident when she came between him and some geese at which he was shooting. Everybody was very upset about this: they explained to me that no other bird is as beautiful or graceful as the swan. I was told that the swan provides for itself without inflicting harm on any other living creature. There are swans in profusion on the lochs of Berneray, and long may they remain there. Even though I was only three years old at the time, the death of the swan made a deep impression upon me and I've been fascinated by the creatures ever since.

My mother was my father's second wife, and although my half-brother Donald Alick was only seventeen years old, he took it upon himself to support his father's widow and her two sons by fishing and hunting for animals and working with the horse and cart on my uncle's croft. Two families were living in my grandfather's house at the time, and although my grandfather himself had passed away the children were growing big and the house was growing small.



Emigration

When my half-brother Donald Alick was about eighteen years old he emigrated to Canada, and my half-sister went off to school in Kingussie. Donald Alick couldn't find any work suitable for a young lad in Berneray, and as neither of his parents was alive he sold his father's fishing-boat and went abroad like so many other young men before him. On the day he left we wept sorely – especially my brother, who was a year and a half older than I: he took Donald Alick's cap to bed with him that night.

But there was no sign of Donald Alick's dog. After a whole week had gone by we found the poor creature drowned – washed up on the shore. He'd tried to swim after the ferry-boat that had taken his master away, and had been overcome by the tide. We two little boys started weeping all over again when we saw the dog our brother had loved so much lying there drowned.

In time Donald Alick married a fine girl in Canada. Her father was from Lewis and she wrote to us regularly. Indeed, their daughter came to visit us with her Lewis grandfather. Bbut Donald Alick himself never came back: he just couldn't face the overwhelming homesickness he knew he'd feel when the time came to return to Canada.



Supporting one another

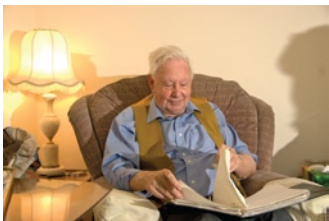


After the autumn work was finished the people would take home the last of the peat: it would be the beginning of winter before the last loads were in, drawn along by little boats and skiffs. The islanders who lived far from the shore had to take their loads home by horse and cart. I'm sure there must have been about three hundred loads of peats landed in Berneray every year, for there were about a hundred houses and many of them got three loads. Many people worked away from home, so those who were left behind on the island had to labour from morn till night before the bad weather came.

The children did their share of the work, making sure that before the winter storms set in there wasn't a single old man or woman who wasn't protected by a well-thatched house and a peat-stack at its gable-end.

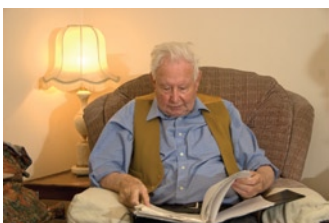


As already explained, we had to get the peat from the islands in the Sound of Harris and Uist. My mother had to pay five shillings to the estate for the use of the peat-bank. By about the beginning of summer the widows were beginning to run out of peat, and Wee Donald and his 'scrap crew' – my brother Norma and I – would scratch around all the peat-banks in the islands in search of scraps of peat and old turf, and the old ladies were thankful even for that.



There was one big strong widow in the Port, Anna Iain Mhòir³¹, who used to fill up the window of her bedroom with dry seaweed for the winter. This protected her window so well that she never even heard the winter storms. She was a funny old lady: Big John MacLeod was her father – as strong as any man that ever lived in Berneray. Her neighbour had a radio, and she called the accumulator 'the old man's tin-can'. She wasn't far wrong with her translation.

Where she lived there were three houses all in a long row, with one continuous roof. Two of the houses opened to the front, while the door of the third house opened out to the back. These three houses, freshly-thatched and sitting on the meadow beside the sea, made a lovely peaceful picture. In those days people took pride in their work. Even the corn-stacks were beautifully thatched over with marram-grass.



31 'Big John's Anne'

Biothbhuantachd

Cha do chùm togalaichean àrd a' bhaile
Riamh bhuam sealladh na grèine
Ga falach fhèin gu sàmhach, nàrach
Sa chuan
Air cùlaibh Hirt.

No idir sealladh na maidne glòrmhoir
A choisich mi sràid airgid eilean m' àraich
Eadar na coilleagan len trusganan geala
Gu sàilean
Agus an cuan a bha mar chriostal
Geàrrte.

'S ged tha mi 'n-diugh gu dòigheil
Am measg sluaigh làn uail is gean
Tha mise fhathast nam ònar far a bheil
Na siantan
A' dòrtadh sìorraidheachd
Air mìle sgeir.

*Air feasgar soilleir chitheadh tu
Hirt à Beàrnaraigh ...*

*Sgrìobh am bàrd an dàn seo nuair
a bha e a' fuireach ann an Glaschu
agus a' dol gu clasaichean-oidhche
ann an litreachas na Beurla. 'S e
fear Èireannach a bha ga theagasg
a bha foghlamaichte sna cànanan
Ceilteach agus Clasaigeach.*

Eternity

*The high buildings of the city
Never concealed from me the sight of the sun
Disappearing down quietly, modestly
Into the sea
Behind St Kilda,*

*Nor the sight of the glorious morning
When I walked the silver paths round the island of my youth
Between the white-clothed sand-dunes
To a little bay
And the ocean that was like cut
crystal.*

On a clear evening you could see
St Kilda from Berneray ...

The poet wrote this poem during
his stay in Glasgow, during which
time he attended evening classes in
English Literature. He was taught
by an Irishman who was a scholar
of Celtic and Classics.

*And though today I'm content enough
Among people who are gallus and good humoured
Still I am all alone where
The elements
Pour eternity
Over a thousand rocks.*

An gràmadaiche

Gu sgrìobhainn sios nam b' urrainn domh,
Mar an t-Urramach MacLeòid,
Litir laghach Ghàidhlig
Gu mo nàbaidh, Coinneach còir,
'S gun innsinn-sa na càsan
A dh'fhàg mi 'n-diugh gun treòir
Bhon fhuair mi leabhar gràmair
Nuair bha mi air tìr-mòr.

Leugh mi ann bhith mionaideach,
Prepositions lean gu dlùth,
'S iad uabhasach *imperative* –
Ron an *dative case* co-dhiù:
'S e sin na facail shìmplidh
Mar tha 'aig' is 'ris' is 'leis'
Ach feumaidh tu na *genitives*
Ag èirigh air a' Cheist.

'S na *svarabhakti vowels* ud,
Gun do dh'fhaillich orm an lorg:
Tha iad, ged nach faic sibh iad,
Ann am iclan mar tha 'borb';
'S ann an-dè a leugh mi
Gu bheil tè an 'gorm' co-dhiù –
'S e mo bheachd 's mo thuaiream
Gu bheil fuaim aice mar brùchd.

Chaidh mi chun an dotair
Le *subjunctive mood* nam cheann,
Is thuir e rium, *accusative*,
“Do choire fhèin a th' ann:
Fan air falbh bho ghràmar
Agus tòisich air a' ghruth,
Is fàg *proclitic particles* –
Chan eil nas miosa dhut.”

Bha an sgoilear an Dr Urr. Ruairidh MacLeòid na mhinistear ann am Beàrnaraigh. Tha e a-nis anns an Fhùirneis ann an Earra-Ghàidheal. Nuair a bha e ann am Beàrnaraigh bha e na neach-deasachaidh air a' phàipear-naidheachd Crùisgean, far an do nochd feadhainn dhe na dàin sa cho-chruinneachadh seo airson a' chiad uair.

The grammarian

*I'd write, if I were able,
Like the Reverend MacLeod,
An elegant Gaelic letter
To my neighbour, dear Kenneth,
To tell him about the catastrophe
That has left me feeling quite faint today
Since buying a grammar book
When I was over on the mainland.*

*I read how I must scrupulously
Follow prepositions,
For they're awfully imperative –
At least before the dative case:
They're those simple little words
Like 'at' and 'to' and 'with' –
And you also need to make sure your genitives
Are used correctly.*

*And what about those svarabhakti vowels –
I've searched for them in vain:
It seems that they
Lurk unseen in words like borb;
And yesterday I read
That there's one in gorm as well –
Though, to be perfectly honest,
It sounds more like a burp to me.*

*I went off to the doctor
Complaining of a subjunctive mood in the head,
And he said to me, accusatively,
"It's entirely your own fault:
Stay off the grammar,
Take up crowdie instead,
And avoid proclitic particles –
There's nothing worse for the health."*

The Rev. Dr Roddy MacLeod is a popular minister and Gaelic scholar. He was formerly minister in Berneray, and is now in Furnace in Argyll. While in Berneray he edited *Crùisgean*, a Gaelic newspaper, in which several of the poems collected here were first published.

Fèath nan eun

Fèath nan eun air muir an taibh,
Agus murt an fheasgair trom air saoghal Eileanach:
Laigh an t-sìth cho suaimhneach
Air mo dhìomhaireachd 's gun do shaoil mi
Gun do thàlaidh gràdh air falbh gu tur
An-ìochdmhorachd,
Gus an do rinn brag na h-urchrach
Dearg-tholl murtach
Ann an cridhe mo smuaintean.

Flat calm

*Flat calm upon the ocean,
And the sultriness of the evening lying heavy upon an Island world:
The peace lay so gently
Upon my solitude that I began to think
Love had completely lulled to sleep
Cruelty,
Until the sound of that shot sent
A murderous red bull's-eye
Straight into the heart of my thoughts.*

© Andy Rodger



An luchair 1939

July 1939

© Isa Nic'Illip
© Isa MacKillop



Muinntir à Ruisigearraidh a' leigeil an
anail o chur a' bhuntàta, mu 1960

A group of Ruisgarry residents taking a
break from potato planting, circa 1960

© Sineag NicIlleathain
© Sineag MacLean



Cairistiona agus Fionnlagh Peatarsan
len teaghlach aig a' Gheodha Dhubh, mu 1920.
A barrachd air bùth a bhith aige, b' e Fionnlagh
fear-clàraidh an èilèin eadar 1903 agus 1952

Christina and Finlay Paterson pictured
with their family at Geodhu, circa 1920.
Finlay, as well as being a shopkeeper, was the
island's registrar between 1903 and 1952

© Fionnlagh agus Mairead Pheatarsan
© Finlay and Margaret Paterson



A' sealltainn a null gu Cùl na Bèinne
tarsainn Loch a' Bhàigh

Looking towards Cùl na Bèinne
across Loch a' Bhàigh

© Fionnlagh agus Mairead Pheatarsan
© Finlay and Margaret Paterson



Davaar Cottage, am Poll an Oir, an 1978

Davaar Cottage, Poll an Oir

© Linda Gowans



*I had hoped to hold in my hand once again the spirit of my bygone youth
When I found a Bible set out upon a table: I read a little verse or two,
But instead of warmth I found there only wounds, and my eyes wept shamelessly –
Bereft of all my beloved people, like a ghost revisiting an empty room.*

*At last I returned down to the boat like a man beset by terrible internal storms,
And the rock – now a refuge to crowds of birds – disappeared forever below the waves.
No scholar has ever established for certain what the name of the place signifies,
Though bygone generations wrote that it means ‘the Rock of Death’.*

Tha an taigh-tughaidh seo aig an Laimrig,
faisg air a' Bhaile

This thatched cottage is at Lamerig, near Baile



Sealladh nas fhaide air falbh air an taigh ud
agus air taigh eile aig an Laimrig, a chuireadh
air dòigh is a chaidh a thughadh a-rithist

Distant view of previous cottage and
another cottage at Lamerig, which
has also been restored and thatched



Faisg air meadhan Bheàrnaraigh. Na thobhta
a-nis, ach bhathar a' fuireach ann sna 1970an

Berneray near the centre of the island. Now a
ruin, this house was lived in in the 1970s



Sealladh eile air na taighean
aig a' Phort am Borgh

A different view of the cottages
at Port in Borne



An seann sabhal bhon iar-dheas, fear dhe na ciad
thogalaichean a bh' aig na Leòdaich; theirear gur
h-e an togalach as sine a tha na sheasamh am
Beàrnaraigh, is coltas gum buin e dhan 18mh linn

S.W. view of the old barn which was one of the
buildings owned by the Macleods; said to be the
oldest extant building in Berneray at Baile, dated
probably 18th c



Taobh a deas an t-seann Taigh-Gunna, mar a th' air
aig RCHMS agus ann an sgrìobhaidhean. Ach tha
a shuidheachadh agus a thogail ga fhàgail coltach
ri caibeal. Chuireadh mullach ùr air bho thogadh an
dealbh seo

Southern projection of the Old Gunnery (so called
by RCHMS and in publications); however it has the
positioning and structural characteristics of a chapel.
It has been re-roofed since this picture was taken



Luinneag na Corbhait

♩. = 108



"Seinn d' fhìd - eag suas, mo ghill__e cruaidh,"ghlaodh fear nam bann__ an



òir,_____ "'S dèan cabh - ag luath, 's na fàg na shuain aon seòl - dair truagh air



bòrd:_____ Tha Chabh - lach Mhars - an - ta sa chaol cur



smùid__ dhan àird an iar_____ Is Pàd - raig_ Gor-(o)m suas



ris gach__ crann mar shamh - la sinn__ bhith triall."_____