

# COIGACH HERITAGE

## Newsletter Summer 2020

**Welcome to our newsletter. Read on to find out what's happening...**

We hope you enjoy reading this newsletter, which is packed full of stories from Coigach's distant and not-so-distant past. Many thanks to those who have contributed articles and photographs, and to everyone who volunteers their help and knowledge throughout the year. We really are fortunate to live in a place with such a rich heritage!



*Dinner at the Hydroponicum*

We've had some enjoyable fundraising events, the highlight of the Heritage year being, of course, the Heritage Tea, at which, alongside the fantastic local baking, people enjoyed an exhibition on Coigach's Fishing History by Angus Macleod and a preview of photographs by Fi Taylor and Peter Haring for the *Coigach: Who We Are* project. Later in the year, archaeologist Cathy Dagg gave a well-attended

### **What have we done this year?**

This year has been a busy one! We have ventured into the world of social media, setting up Facebook and Instagram pages where we share photographs from the archive and interesting articles connected to Coigach. We're gradually putting the catalogue online, learning how to use eHive along the way. This is a big project and will be well worth the effort when it is fully up and running, enabling people to search through a wealth of material.



*Detail from Daniell's print of Tanera Mor*

and interesting talk on the history of the local herring stations on Tanera Mor, Isle Martin and in Ullapool.

## Members' News

Thank you so much to donors and supporters. Although big social fundraising events will have to be put on hold for the time being, we hope to be able to run some online events as the months go by to help keep Coigach's rich heritage very much alive. To raise essential funds, we may even be able to have our Heritage Tea, although it might look slightly different to normal: watch this space! If you're *au fait* with Zoom and the like and would enjoy giving a talk about a local topic – live or recorded – we would love to hear from you!



*Heritage Tea, 2019*

## Membership Renewal

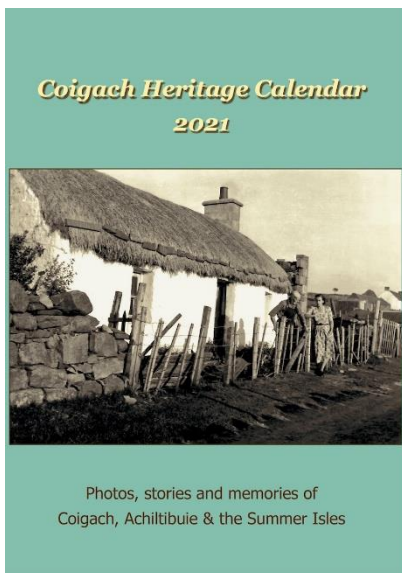
Many thanks to our new and existing members. If you're not already a member, please do sign up – we really need you and value your support more than ever! This year our income is going to be very much reduced due to the pandemic so your subscriptions will be particularly welcomed. It costs only £10 a year - email us at [coigach.heritage@gmail.com](mailto:coigach.heritage@gmail.com) for our banking details and please, if possible, set up a yearly standing order. Membership runs from the beginning of April until the end of March the following year. Fees are also payable by cheque (made payable to Coigach Heritage) posted to the address below. Thank you!



*Coigach Heritage*

## Coming soon... the Heritage Calendar!

We've been really enjoying looking through some of the wonderful old photos you've sent us and have compiled images for the 2021 calendar which will be on sale before too long – keep an eye out for it!



Photos, stories and memories of  
Coigach, Achiltibuie & the Summer Isles

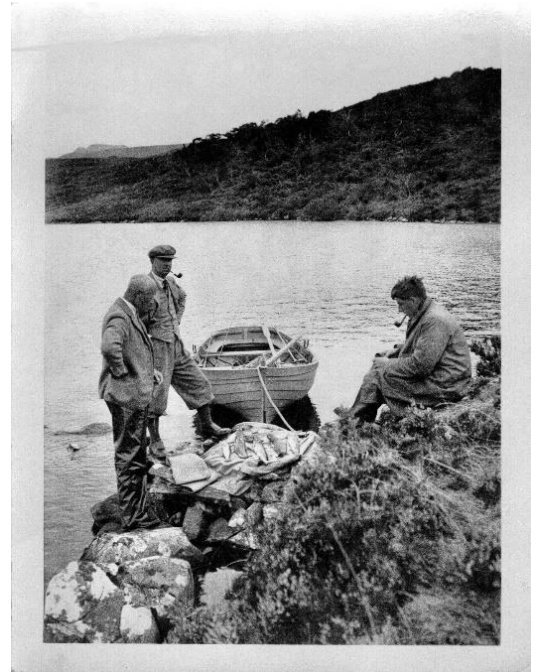


### **A Vote of Thanks for Bill**

A huge vote of thanks has to go to Bill Drake, who has decided to stand down as Chairman, a role he has held since the Coigach Community Heritage Group was set up in 2002. It is thanks to Bill and his tireless support that Coigach Heritage is still thriving. He and Pauline Ward were the backbone of the group. Bill first came to Coigach as a boy and has a wealth of stories about the old days and the changes he has witnessed. We shall miss his steady hand at the tiller.

### **Heritage Projects**

There are a number of interesting projects on the go, and one of our ultimate aims is to have a visitor/heritage centre in Coigach. The Achiltibuie Tourist Association chaired by David Green continues to make progress with this exciting project to celebrate our culture and heritage. There were many and varied creative and supportive comments from the first public consultation event and having taken advice from Highland Council, ATA is now considering drafting an outline planning application for a site in Achiltibuie. The project is at a very early stage and ATA will continue to involve the community and local organisations as it develops. Watch this space!



*Fishing on one of the lochs*



*Goats, Isle Ristol*

*This first article describes the history of one of Coigach's hidden gems. **Please note that the garden is private and not open for visitors.***

## ***Memories of the Achduart Gardens***

The beautiful gardens at the old schoolhouse at Achduart were created in the 1950s by Ruth and Kenny John Macleod. Ruth had come to Achiltibuie to work for Tom and Charmian Longstaff. Kenny John was a renowned and popular fiddler, son of the local blacksmith in Polglass. They settled in Achduart and together they created their oasis from the hostile, bare and exposed hillside. It was a labour of love and a tribute to Ruth's vision alongside Kenny John's hard work and dedication.



*Ruth and Kenny John Macleod*

They started by planting trees around the perimeter to provide shelter, then set about designing and planting what was in many ways like an English country garden.

Every July in the early 1960s the 'up end' schoolgirls were invited for a picnic on the lawn near the pond. We put on our best frocks and walked to Achduart from Polglass, Badenscallie and Culnacraig. The sun was always shining. There were tartan rugs on the lawn and we had fresh strawberries from the garden, jelly, lemonade and other delights. The stylish picnic mugs and plates would have looked at home on the Royal Yacht Britannia. The gardens we knew as children were alive with colour, scents and birdsong. Flowering trees, azaleas, fuchsias, scented roses, jasmine, herbaceous plants and rhododendrons. Rambling roses clambered up the old school walls and paths meandered to sheltered seating areas.

The garden passed to new owners in the 1990s and they planted eucalyptus and more rhododendron species. Slowly it has evolved from a traditional garden to beautiful woodland.



*The 'up end' schoolgirls*

Anne Barnes speaks affectionately of the garden she has nurtured on behalf of different owners for 20 years. She describes the wonderful birdsong and how the numbers and variety of birds has increased steadily over the years due partly to climate change, but also habitat improvements within the woodland. There are speckled wood brown butterflies once rare in these parts: it was an event to see a pair tumbling in sunlight shafts, but now they have spread throughout the woodland. The present owners are restoring some of the earlier features of the garden which would have pleased Ruth and Kenny John.



*The Old Shoolhouse, 1960s*

*Mairi Thornton*

*In this next article, Pauline Ward tells us how she and her husband Mike came to live here and to run Polbain Stores over thirty years ago.*

## ***The Wards Come to Polbain***

During the summer of 1982, Mike and I had the chance to visit Achiltibuie. My sister and her family had holidayed in Ullapool and the surrounding area each year and Mike and I were invited to join them in a rental house in Achiltibuie – in Dornie, at a house that belonged to the Wrathalls. This was to be the trip that would lead to the eventual change in our lives. My first sight of Badentarbet... the sea... the island... the hills... took me back to where my sister and I grew up - Shatin in Hong Kong - and this led to our subsequent visits each year.

Mike got a small boat one year and would spend hours fishing haddies and mackerel.

Each year the visits were eagerly anticipated: my sister even toyed with the idea of buying a house that had come up for sale.

Wendy Bell was the agent for our rental house and she knew Mike and I were interested in getting a holiday house. In May 1987 an envelope came through the letterbox at our house in Leeds: it was information about a house and shop for sale in Polbain.

*This envelope was to change our lives forever...* and I moved up to Polbain on 11 September 1987, Mike and my son doing all the hard work!

Stocktaking with vendor, Angus McInnis, was done on 12 September; Mike and I became the new proprietors on Monday 13 September. After giving me a bag of change to get me started, Mike set off to Leeds to work a term's notice.

Ann Davis had been the shop assistant and stayed on to help me settle into my life as a shopkeeper. She was so helpful and kind and this meeting was the making of an enduring friendship.

Running the shop was a 'baptism' of sorts! I had been in adult education most of my working life, so fairly used to working with adults. On my first day, I met quite a few of the locals. There wasn't much stock, but I recall selecting the largest potatoes and displaying them as 'Jacket Spuds' which sold very quickly!

I had left my job in Health Education where I would run 'Quit Smoking' sessions: that first day I was mortified to be standing against the tobacco display!

I would close the shop each Thursday morning for my stock trip to Inverness. On my first trip out I called in at Parlett's to settle a paper bill (Angus McInnis had arranged papers for four of his customers). Mrs Parlett was extremely kind and helpful and suggested Mike and I could get our own paper account with John Menzies. (A couple of weeks later, after Mike set up the account, the papers would come in with Maggie 'Han' each afternoon.)



After picking up goods in Inverness, I called in at Munro the Butchers in Dingwall to collect the meat order. That first day I was SO hungry after my early start and a most delicious smell was coming from Munro's large shed at the back of the shop... A tentative knock...revealed tables of freshly baked meat pies! That was the start of Munro's meat AND pies in Polbain Stores! I couldn't resist one on my way back.

Mike popped up at half term, and then moved up at Christmas. This was the beginning of a huge transformation in our lives.

We had agreed to run the shop for 10 years, and those were to be the happiest years Mike and I could ever have envisaged.

The Coigach folk were kind and friendly; customers became friends and these friendships have endured.

*Pauline Ward*

*Next, this article from Malcolm Bangor-Jones - a snapshot of life here in the late 19th Century. Some familiar names in here.*

### ***Report on crofters of Altandhu in 1887***

In their history of the Cromartie estate Eric Richards and Monica Clough describe the Crofters' Revolt of the 1880s. This was part of a wider ongoing movement across the Highlands which led to the Crofters' Holdings (Scotland) Act in 1886. Thirty years earlier in the 1950s there had been a successful Coigach rebellion against clearance.

Richards and Clough quote from a report drawn up in February 1887 on Coigach. The report details the circumstances (as viewed by the estate managers) of crofters who were more than one year in arrears with their rents. What follows is a transcription of the report for Altandhu.

**210 Kenneth McLean**, 40, single, mother 78 and delicate & sister 50, single, live with him. Stock: 4 cows, 4 followers, 10 sheep. Has boat 16ft. Able bodied but no energy; seeing stock should be urged to pay.

**211 Widow Mary MacLeod**, 52. Son, 28, single and only child, living with her; John McLeod 50 and silly, distant relative, also living with her. No other inmates. Stock: 2 cows, 2 followers. 10 sheep. Son has 1 net. No great energy about son; should be urged to pay.



*Coigach tweedmakers, late 19th Century*

**212 John McLean**, 80 years of age, widower. Bedridden. 3 sons and 1 daughter in family. Stock: 4 cows, 2 followers, 8 sheep. Sons have big boat which is old & nets. 1 son delicate. Rent only small and might have paid. Sons said to have money in bank and are applicants for half of vacant neighbouring lot.

**215 William McLean**, 70 years of age, married, no family. Stock: 1 cow, 3 followers, 12 sheep. This man old and no family to assist; recovering of arrears seems doubtful & future prospects not encouraging.

**216 Murdo McLean**, 58 years of age, married, 2 children, daughter 17 & son 15. Stock: 3 cows, 2 followers, 2 sheep. Himself advanced and heavy in person & son young - prospects do not look bright.

**217 John McLean**, 44 years of age, married, 3 children, oldest 13 years, youngest 2 months. Mother 70 and sickly, 2 sisters 35 and 31, and brother 30, single, in family. Stock: 1 mare, 1 foal, 6 cows, 3 followers, 10 sheep. He is shoemaker and prominent L L [Land League] Reformer. Seeing able brother in family and stock, should be urged to pay.

**218 Kenneth McLean**, 72 years of age, married, 4 children 2 sons and 2 daughters. Sons 34 and 28, single and at home. Stock: 2 cows, 2 followers, 8 sheep. Sons have boat. Resolved to withhold arrears till Crofters' Commissioners give decision. It is conjectured that all applicants from the estate have the same ideas. General steps for recovery of arrears in such circumstances rendered all the more necessary.

**219 Kenneth McLean**, carpenter, 60 years of age, married, 4 children 3 sons and 1 daughter. A son in Liverpool, Hotel Manager, used to assist. Stock: 2 cows, 2 followers, 5 sheep. Should be urged to pay.

**220 Donald McLean**, 48 years of age, married, 8 children, oldest 13, youngest only infant. Stock: 1 horse, 1 cow, 2 followers, 4 sheep. No other means. With heavy family and no assistance, recovery of arrears would be hopeless, but legacy in prospect from estate of uncle, late Kenneth Graham, Achiltibuie.

**221 Alexander Stewart**, single, able bodied. Maiden sister living with him, would not tell age nor sheep stock. Other stock: 1 horse, 1 cow, 2 followers, 1 bull. Peculiar and quarrelsome, under proceedings for recovery of arrears. Agrees to pay only old rent. He has money. Proceedings against him should be carried out.



*Peat cutter, Coigach*

**222 Murdo McLean**, 80 years of age, married, wife 75 and on bed, 6 children: 4 sons and 2 daughters. 2 sons in Manchester used to assist him but having experienced reverses recently are not in position to assist at present, 1 son at home delicate. Stock: 3 cows, 3 followers, 10 sheep. Family not in a prosperous way at present.

**223 Kenneth Mackenzie**, 41 years of age, married, 5 children (boys, oldest 9 years). Stock: 1 cow, 3 followers, 8 sheep. No other means. Not robust and no energy. Mother and sister both chargeable live with him. Generally poor.

Malcolm Bangor-Jones

*Another piece of township history, this time extracts from a Dictaphone recording of Kenny MacLennan in the 1986 collection, 'Coigach Clippings'.*



*Reiff cliffs across Camas Eilean Ghlais*

## ***Reiff and Faochag***

The village of Faochag: the last lady who went to school there died in Ullapool some eight years ago. She used to cross the hill up at the back of Balirbuie to walk to Altandhu school. At that time it was the Mackenzies who lived on the other side, at Faochag. They had a mill working on the burn that goes down to the sea from Totaig – Totaig Mill they called it – so at that time there must have been a fair amount of production.

Reiff itself seems to have quite an old history: the two Mackenzie brothers in Lewis fell out over the estate; Torcull Choinnich was

chased by his brother and put in an open boat with no oars and told to clear out, so the story has it. With the wind, which was evidently in the west, he landed at Meall Torcull, which is a point on the far side of the bridge at Reiff – on the island. It still has the same name, and history shows that he must have landed about 1625. He was supposed to have come to a ruin that is just below the dune at Reiff.

My grandfather came up from Reiff to Blairbuie in 1860 and built our house. He was the first postman when Penny Post began and he went to Ullapool twice a week, walking up to Culnacraig and then over the rocks. His pay at that time was 2/3 per trip – 4/6 per week – but there were only ever a handful of letters coming into the place and never any parcels. There were many people of course in those days who were not able to write.



*Faochag ruins*



Between 1969 and 1970, Achiltibuie School undertook a project collecting legends, which was introduced by Nicky Tweddle and transcribed by Jean Ross. Here are three of the legends...

### **The Girl from Greenhill**

“In a house at Green Hill a girl lived; she was about five years old. One day her mother told her to go up to the other house up above theirs (it was a blizzard at the time) so she went and she must have got lost in the snow. Then everybody started to look for her; it was about three days later that she was found, dead on the hill. She was buried where she was found and you can still see the place now - there is a hump of stones there.”

### **The Legend of Loch Lurgainn**

“Many years ago there was a giant who lived in Sutherland. There was an Irish giant who hated the other one and so he wanted to kill him. The giant from Sutherland started to run. He slung his mother on his back and when they were about eight miles away the Irish man gave up and went home. The other giant came to a loch and when he looked round it was only his mother’s ankles he was left holding. So he threw them in the loch. There are two big trees in that loch and they say that these are her ankles and to this day that loch is known as Loch Lurgainn (or ‘loch of the shins’).”



*Loch Lurgainn*

### **The Legend of Stag’s Leap**

“Many years ago some men went out hunting stags. They saw a magnificent stag and stalked it for some time. The stag got their wind and ran down to a point on the shore from which there was no escape. He took one great leap across to Isle Martin. Ever since that point has been known as Lewm-an-daimbh... or Stag’s Leap.”

## Coigach and 'The Forgotten Dunkirk'

At 10am on June 12th, pipers up and down the country took to their doorsteps to play the haunting pipers march, Heroes of St Valéry. It was organised by Scottish Armed Forces charities as poignant tribute to thousands of men who were killed or captured during "the forgotten Dunkirk" 80 years ago. <https://51hd.co.uk/news>

June 1940 left an indelible mark on the Coigach community.

While most of Britain breathed a sigh of relief after the Dunkirk evacuations, little was said about the thousands of men of the 51st Highland Battalion who were left behind under French command. Five Coigach men lost their lives at the Battle of Abbeville on June 4th: brothers Alex and John Maclean, Murdo MacIennan (the schoolmaster), Alexander Macleod aged 23 and Johnny Alick Macleod from Polglass. Like most Lochbroom men they had joined the Seaforth Highlanders and were mobilised in September 1939. They left Southampton in January 1940 for overseas service - so they had been in France only a matter of months before they were killed.



*Coigach's Seaforth Highlander*

Only days later the Battle of St Valéry, 60 miles south of Abbeville, was fought against overwhelming odds. By June 12th those who were not killed in the fierce fighting or fell to their deaths from the cliffs trying to escape, were captured. They were then marched hundreds of miles to Prisoner of War camps in Eastern Europe, where they endured appalling conditions for five long years. Among them were 7 Coigach men: Donald Fraser, Robert Graham, Roddie Macdonald, Hector Mackenzie, Roddie Mackenzie, William (Bobby) Mackenzie, William (Boy) Macleod and Willie Clark, who lived in Island View in his later years.

Others Coigach men lost their lives or were seriously injured later in the war. All their stories have been documented by Clare Church and gifted to Coigach Heritage. Her research can be found at <http://www.rossandcromartyheritage.org/community/Coigach/Folk/Coigach-s-Sacrifice-in-the-Second-World-War.aspx>

## ***And finally... a recipe from the fantastic Coigach Cooks***

This, from Maureen, who is much missed.

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### Dublin Coddle

A Dublin dish that was traditionally served when "the Men" came home from the pub on a Saturday night. Very tasty too!!

- 1 lb. (or more) pork sausages - the better the sausages the better the coddle.
- 1 lb bacon rashers (bacon pieces will do fine)
- 2 or 3 large onions, sliced thickly
- 2 carrots, sliced thickly
- 4 or 5 large potatoes, thickly sliced
- small bunch of thyme
- black pepper
- chopped parsley
- \* At least a pint of dry cider, probably more

Heat a little oil in a frying pan. Dip the sausages in seasoned flour and brown lightly in the oil. Soften the onions in the same oil. Place the sausages, bacon and onion in a large saucepan with the sliced potatoes and carrots. Bury a bunch of thyme in the centre and cover with cider. Cook over a low heat for at least an hour. Do not boil. If preferred cook in a casserole in a mod. oven for the same time. I prefer to do this as you don't have to worry about it sticking. When ready, garnish with parsley and serve.

Delicious served with crusty bread and washed down with a mug of Guinness.

\* Cider is a departure from the traditional. Most people would use water or stock, however the cider adds a nice sharp "bite" to the flavour, and, or so I'm told, loses its alcoholic content during the long cooking!

Maureen Fraser

## **Coigach Heritage Committee**

Mairi Thornton, Una Macgregor, Abigail Anne Campbell, Cathy MacNeilage, Julia Campbell, Veronica Vossen-Wood, David Green, Ali Macleod, Ann Marie Firth-Bernard

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