Applecross - Our People and Places

This booklet is full of interesting information about place names, folklore, history and stories from the picturesque area of Applecross, Wester Ross. All of the information was collected by Fèis a’ Bhealaich participants who interviewed local Gaelic speakers about the heritage of the area.
Fèisean nan Gàidheal’s Archiving Project

Fèisean nan Gàidheal’s archiving project is aimed at encouraging Fèis participants from across Scotland to collect, record and present local heritage from their own areas. The Fèis a’ Bhèalaich participants, all of whom live in the Applecross area and attend Applecross Primary School, have been involved in this project since January 2008 and have been interviewing local Gaelic speakers to find out more about the heritage of their own area.

Fèis a’ Bhèalaich participants have worked extremely hard on the project; the participants all came up with their own questions for the interviews and wrote out the transcriptions themselves with assistance from the project co-ordinator. As the local Gaelic tradition has been the basis for this project, all the participants have been learning some of the local dialect and as you read through the booklet you will see that each of the participants were given the opportunity to ask each informant a question in Gaelic. The booklet contains a selection of the material collected during the project including information on Gaelic place names, folklore, local history, stories as well as the participants own illustrations, a selection of which portray the Gaelic meaning of local place names. We hope you enjoy reading and learning about the Applecross area!

Emily Edwards
Project Co-ordinator, Fèisean nan Gàidheal

Fèis a’ Bhèalaich Participants:
Bethany Walker – primary 4
Robbie Fairweather Graham – primary 5
Bronwyn Glover [Bronny] – primary 5
Daniel Goldthorpe – primary 5
Emilly Kilbride – primary 5
Kirsten Glover – primary 7

With special thanks to the informants for sharing their time and knowledge:
Duncan Murchison - Culduie
Donald Ferguson - Milton
Catherine Johnson - Kenmore
Donald MacCuish - Kenmore

And with thanks to the following for their assistance in the project:
Fèis a’ Bhèalaich committee and in particular Derek MacLennan who instigated the project, Catriona Mc Cowan from Applecross Primary School and Roddy Maclean for his assistance in place-name research and proof-reading.

About the project

Mun phròiseact

Pròiseact nan Tasglann
Fèisean nan Gàidheal

’S e pròiseact ùr aig Fèisean nan Gàidheal a th’ ann am Pròiseact nan Tasglann far an tèid com-pàirtichean nam Fèisean air feadh Alba bhrosnachadh gu bhith a’ cruinmeanadh, a’ clàrachadh agus a’ taisbeanadh dualchas iondail nan gàidhean aca fhèin. Tha com-pàirtichean Fèis a’ Bhèalaich, a tha uile a’ fùireach ann an Sgìre na Conraich agus a’ dol gu Bun-sgoil na Comraich, air a bhith an sàs anns a’ pròiseact seo bhon Phaoileach 2008 agus tha iad air agallamh a dhéanamh còmhla ri luchd na Gàidhlig às an sàs agus barrachd ionnsachadh mu dhualchas na coimhearsnachd.

Tha na com-pàrtichean air a bhith ag obair gu trang air a’ pròiseact; ’s iad fhèin a smaoinich air na ceistean agallaimh agus rinn iad na tar-sgrìobhaidhean dhaibh fhèin le cuideachadh bho co-òrdanaiche na pròiseict. Chaidh cudrom a chuir air Gàidhlig na Comraich leis a’ pròiseact seo agus tha na com-pàrtichean air a leadhadh a’ fhuireadh ri dhualchas na coimhearsnachd.

Fhàd ’s e tha thu a’ leughadh tron leabhran seo chì thu gun do chuir gach com-pàrtichean ceist air an luchd-bhratha ann an Gàidhlig.

Emily Edwards
Co-òrdanaiche na Pròiseict, Fèisean nan Gàidheal

Co-òrdanaiche na Pròiseict, Fèisean nan Gàidheal

Com-pàrtichean na Fèise:
Bethany Walker - clas 4
Robbie Fairweather Graham – clas 5
Bronwyn Glover [Bronny] – clas 5
Daniel Goldthorpe – clas 5
Emilly Kilbride – clas 5
Kirsten Glover – clas 7

Le taing mhòr don luchd-bhratha airson an tìne agus eolas:
Donnchadh MacCalmain - Cùil Duibh
Dòmhnall MacFhearghais – Baile a’ Mhuilinn
Catriona NicIain – A’ Cheannmhor
Dòmhnall MacCuish – A’ Cheannmhor

Aghus do na daoine a leanas airson an cuideachadh:
Comataidh Fèis a’ Bhèalaich agus gu h-àraidh Derek MacI’Ill fhinnein a chuir a’ pròiseact air bhonn, Catriona NicCòmhghan aig Bun-sgoil na Comraich agus do Ruairidh MacI’leathan a’ sàise airson a chuireadh le rannsachadh aon mean-àite agus leughadh-dearbhaidh.

Emily Edwards
Co-òrdanaiche na Pròiseict, Fèisean nan Gàidheal

Fèis a’ Bhèalaich - Our People and Places
Ainmean-àite Sgìre na Comraich
Place Names of Applecross

(Ainmean-àite Gàidhlig a tha air ainmeachadh san leabhran seo
~ Gaelic Place Names that are mentioned in this booklet)
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Toscaig, Ard Dubh, Ard Ban and Culduie

Interview with Duncan Murchison:
The Ferry, Work, Gaelic and Place Names, Local History, Music
“…when the ferry was running there wasn’t a low level road and the Bealach used to get blocked in the winter so the ferry provided the link with other places…”

Agallamh còmhla ri Donnchadh MacCalmain
Interview with Duncan Murchison

An Aiseag ~ The Ferry

Kirsten: What was it like when the ferry came in [at Toscaig]?
Duncan Murchison: It was quite busy on some days and the post van went down for the mails. There were lots of passengers. It was especially busy in the summer, people went down to see what was happening.

Bronny: What things did the ferry bring?
Duncan: It brought the mails, it brought passengers, it took milk and the groceries as well. It would take anything you needed it to.

Bronny: Why doesn’t the ferry come anymore?
Duncan: When the ferry was running there wasn’t a low level road and the Bealach used to get blocked in the winter so the ferry provided the link with other places. When the road opened round the coast the ferry wasn’t needed anymore.

Daniel: Did many people use the ferry?
Duncan: Yes, especially in the summer, not as much in the winter. As people got cars themselves it was used less and less. And the school children used to go across on it when the hostel opened at Plockton...they used to go on Monday and come back on Friday.

Bethany: When did the ferry stop working?
Duncan: I think it stopped in 1976. It stopped when the coast road opened. The children went to Plockton school on a boat that came for them, there was an arrangement made whereby it came for them but that stopped as well after a while.
Robbie: What sort of work did people do?
Duncan: ...Oh there was lots of different types of work...some were fishing, some at sea, some did a bit of crofting, some worked on the estate, some worked on the main road and lots of different things. There were builders and a joiner and every sort of thing here and there. Weavers and everything that needed done was done here. Blacksmiths as well, there was a smithy...gardener and different types of work...up at the estate too.

Kirsten: What sort of jobs did you and your family do?
Duncan: I was fishing for ten years and then I worked on the roads. My father was a crofter, though he fished as well. He did whatever work he could get. He spent a lot of time in America. Quite a lot of people from here went to live there. Some came back, some stayed.

Emily E: Could you tell us a bit about why they went to America?
Duncan: Because there was no work here. It was a sort of general thing at the time, everybody went west to begin a new life.

Bronny: Were there any other types of work?
Duncan: There was quite a bit of quarrying for stone. There was a quarry over at Ard Ban. They used to take the stone out of there. And the fishermen did that apparently when there was hard times - they would quarry stone. And they took a lot of it to Kyle and to Lochcarron. A lot of buildings in Kyle are built from stone from Applecross. Another thing people did, quite a lot of them went to sea, to the Merchant Navy.

Daniel: Was there ever a time when the crofts didn’t bring a good harvest? Did you ever have a bad fishing season?
Duncan: Yes, yes there would be times when there would be bad weather, sometimes it would be very wet and we would have great difficulty making hay. Sometimes it was cold as well, but we usually got something. The other thing was the potato blight which destroyed the potato crop once or twice.

Bethany: What animals did they have on the croft?
Duncan: Well we had cows, about everybody had a cow and some sheep and the sheep were allowed into the croft in the winter time and then up onto the hill in the summer time. There were no pigs though, I think Robbie’s pigs were the first pigs I ever saw [in Culdowie]!

Bethany: Did many people have lots of pets?
Duncan: Well not really, most people had a cat and some people had dogs which they kept more or less as pets. Some people had pet sheep, lambs that they had to raise on the bottle. Nobody really made a pet of a cow but the cow was probably the best provided for of all the animals because it was essential for milk and butter and cheese and things like that. Some people occasionally had a pet rabbit and there was a couple in Toscaig who had a parrot! I can just remember it and no more.

Robbie: Were there any tailors in Applecross?
Duncan: Yes, there was at least one tailor. I only remember the last tailor. Before that there were certainly tailors.

Emily: Could thog na taighean?
Donnchadh: ...bha clachairean a’ seo uaireigin. Bha gu leòr a clachairean a’ seo agus’s e iadsan a thog na taighean is bha iad a’ cosnadh na clachan is a h-uile dad a bha dhith orra direach as na creagan...is gan togal.

Emily: Who built the houses?
Duncan: ...there were builders here at one time. There were lots of builders here and it was them who built the houses and they got the stones and everything they needed locally...and built them.

Bethany: An robh mòran taighean air an Aird Dhùibh?
Donnchadh: Uill, bha ri mo latha-sa, tha mi a’ creidsinn gun robh còrr taighean...bha co-dhiù trí taighean eile ann uaireigin...An fheadhainn a tha nan seasamh an-diugh bha iad ann.

Bethany: Were there many houses in Ard Dubh?
Duncan: Well, there were in my day, I believe there were more houses...there was at least three other houses there at one time...The few that are standing there today were there.

“...there was lots of different types of work...some were fishing, some at sea, some did a bit of crofting, some worked on the estate, some worked on the main road…”

*S’ shuas* ‘Shuas’ was the part of South Applecross from Camustiel northwards. ‘Shios’ was everywhere south of that.
Kirsten: Did lots of people speak Gaelic when you were a child?
Duncan: Yes most of them, there were very few that didn’t speak Gaelic. When I came to school here I didn’t speak any English, I had to learn English.

Bethany: What does Ard Ban mean?
Duncan: It’s the fair height, it’s because of the colour...Behind the houses there’s a bit that’s higher than the rest and there’s a beach of white sand. That’s where the name comes from.

Emilly: What does Culduie mean?
Duncan: Cùil Duibh is the black nook but I read somewhere that it was called Cùil Duibh Na Cill, black nook of the cell, so there might have been a monk there at some time.

Daniel: Dè tha Ard Dubh a’ ciallachadh?
Donnchadh: An Æird Dubh, ’s e a’ite a tha beagan nas àirde nan talamh a tha timcheall air agus dubh, ’s e black ann am Beurla. Bha an dà bhaile ri taobhachach a cheàile an Æird Bhàn agus an Æird Dubh.

Daniel: What does Ard Dubh mean?
Duncan: An Æird Dubh is a place that’s a bit higher than the land around it and ‘dubh’ means black in English. There were two places beside each other Ard Ban and Ard Dubh.

An Æird Dubh (The Dark Promontory) Ard Dubh
Drawing by Kirsten

Bronny: Where did people in Ard Dubh get their water from?
Duncan: They used to go to a small well in Ard Dubh. It was a place that was scarce of water, in dry weather they came to Culduie. They came and got their water from the burn in containers and they came in boats.

Cèol ~ Music
Emilly: Did many people play the pipes?
Duncan: Not many people played the pipes but my father could play. There were one or two down in Toscaig but it wasn’t that common.

Kirsten: Did you have many ceilidhs?
Duncan: There were very few organised ceilidhs. What we call a ceilidh is when we just go into people’s houses for a visit. There was a lot of that at one time, especially in the winter time.

Bronny: Were there many music teachers?
Duncan: No, there was just the one in the school here.

“...what we call a ceilidh is when we just go into people’s houses for a visit...”
Baile a’ Mhuilinn, Camus Teile agus Camus Tearach

Agallamh còmhla ri Dòmhnall MacFhearghais:
Gàidhlig agus Ainmean-àite, Taighean agus An Acarsaid, Am Muileann, Bùithean, Làithean Sgoile, Sgeulachdan agus Obair

Milton, Camusteel and Camusterrach

Interview with Donald Ferguson:
Gaelic and Place Names, Housing and the Pier, The Mill, Shops, School Days, Stories and Jobs
“...Uill, a-rithist dh’fhaodadh gu bheil còrr is aon chiallachadh aige [Camus Tearach]. Tha aon fhèar, de na ciallaichean aige, ’s e camus sgeireach....”

Agallamh còmhla ri Dòmhnall MacFhearghais
Interview with Donald Ferguson

Gàidhlig agus Ainmean-àite
~ Gaelic and Place Names

Bronny: What does Camusteel mean?
Donald Ferguson: Camus t-Eile, well, I think there is probably more than one meaning for it. The one I would choose to favour would be camus eile, camus is a bay and you have Camus t-Earrach [East Bay] first of all and then you have Camus t-Eile. And I would say that it would be camus eile which would mean ‘another bay’.

Bronny: Dè tha Camusterrach a’ ciallachadh?
Dòmhnall: Uill, a-rithist dh’fhaodadh gu bheil còrr is aon chiallachadh aige. Tha aon fhèar, de na ciallaichean aige, ’s e camus sgeireach, thar muir is tràigh ann...ach mòran sgeirean a’ tighinn am follais agus tha iad ag ràdh faodadh gur e Camus Sgeireach. Tha fear eile ach chàin eil mi uabhasach cinnteach mu dheidhinn aich tha aon phios shios fo na lotaichean a tha shios an seo, air beul an sgoil, air a bheil an t-a’imh Mac Iain Hearach...Tha cuid a’ cumal a-mach dh’fhaodadh gur e Hearach air choireig a bha a’ fuireach anns an a’itse agus dh’fhaodadh gun robh uaireigin mòran Hearach ann agus gur e Camus Na Hearadh no Camus Tearaich a b’bh’ air.

Bronny: What does Camusterrach mean?
Donald: Well, again there may be more than one meaning for it. One of the meanings for it, is camus sgeireach [rocky bay], there is the sea and a beach...and a lot of rocks that appear and they say that perhaps it was called Camus Sgeireach. There is another one but I’m not sure about it, there is an area down below the fields that are down here, in front of the school, that is called Mac Iain Hearach... Some say that there was a Harris man that lived there and perhaps at one time there were lots of Harris people there and it was called Camus Na Hearadh or Camus Tearaich [bay of the Harris folk].

Bronny: Why don’t many people speak Gaelic now and did many people speak Gaelic when you were younger?
Donald: There’s sadly not as many as should be speaking it because a lot of older people have departed this life and those that have been coming after them weren’t fluent Gaelic speakers or they haven’t kept it up. We are hoping to revive it though. When I was at school I had to be taught English and there was quite a number in the same boat as me then. We weren’t allowed to speak Gaelic.
Kirsten: Were there many people living in Camusteele?  
Donald: Yes, when I was young, there was every house in Camusteele and families living in them. There were one or two houses that only had one or maybe two people in them but most of them had families in them. I’m not sure what number of people would have been there altogether but there would have been a good amount, people staying there then and again there wasn’t the amount of houses that there are today. Lots of houses have been built in Camusteele since then.

Kirsten: When were the council houses in Camusterrach built and what was there before them?  
Donald: They were built in the early eighties and before that there were a couple of barns and a byre. The barns and byre didn’t occupy the whole space but they were the only buildings there, it was quite boggy around there.

“...cha robh an uiread de thailgean ann sa tha ann an-diugh. Tha mòran de taighean ùra air a thogail ann an Camus Teile bhon uairsin....”

Loch a’ Mhuilinn (The Loch of the Mill)  
Milton Loch  
Drawing by Kirsten

Kirsten: Were there more houses in Milton when you were our age than there are now?  
Donald: There were less houses there when I was your age than there are now but there were a lot more people lived there. Families were a lot bigger then.

Kirsten: What was the pier used for in Milton and when was it built?  
Donald: My first recollections of the pier were of the ferry. In the old days everything was brought in by sea. It was the ferry that went from Kyle to Stornoway and it called in at the bay. It was met by a small boat that went out from Milton pier, two men rowed out to meet the big ferry and took off any passengers and any food that came ashore and they landed at the pier at Milton. There were two piers at one time, but now the small one has been washed away. It belonged more to the estate than to the community and they had their own slipway and the shed is still there where the estate used to keep a boat that they used for various things, mostly during the season when the gentry were in residence in the big house.

Robbie: Do you know if local people used the mill in Milton for their own crops?  
Donald: I don’t ever remember the mill when it was in operation but yes, before that they used to grind their own corn. I remember the old mill when it was a bakers shop.

Robbie: An robh mòran dhaoine ag obair anns a’ mhuileann?  
Dòmhnall: Uill, sin rud nach urrainn dhomh innse le cinnt ach tha mi cinnteach gum biodh suas ri sianar no seachdnar a dh’fheumadh a bhith ag obair mu thimcheall air an obair eadar a bhith a’ coinheadh an deidh an uisge bhon abhainn chun an loch, dhan a’ mhuileann agus a’ cur an stuth tron a’ mhuileann is ga chur ann am pocannan agus a’ sin air a bhith ga deamadh ideas. Theirinn gum biodh sianar no seachdnar ach chan eil cinnit sam bith agam air sin.
Robbie: Did many people work in the mill?
Donald: Well, that’s something I couldn’t say for sure but there would have been up to six or seven people that had to work about it between looking after the water from the river to the loch to the mill and putting the stuff through the mill and into bags and then preparing it. I would say that there would be around six or seven but I’m not certain about it.

Robbie: Do you know when they closed the mill and why it closed?
Donald: I’m not too sure when it closed, as a mill it was closed before my time but I think it might have been before the first war as I remember someone telling me they had an early memory of a working cart from the mill and she was born in 1900 so she would have been quite young [at the time]. But I couldn’t say for sure when it was closed. But they closed it because there wasn’t the same amount of need to do their own thrashing because more people were getting their meal and stuff from out with the community.

Bùithtean ~ Shops

Bethany: An robh mòran bhùithtean ann?
Dòmhnall: Uill, bhiodh e suas ri fichead no còrr is fichead anns an sgìre uile gu leir.

Bethany: Were there many shops?
Donald: Well, there would be up to twenty or even more than twenty in the whole area.

Bethany: What were the different types of shops in the area?
Donald: Well, there were quite a number at one time, there was a shop in almost every little township. There was a shop at Toscaig.

Mrs McCowan: Yes, I was told that that lady couldn’t read or write but she kept accounts on an abacus, I think she was blind.

Donald: There was a shop at Camusterrach, there was a shop at Culdhuie, I’m not sure if there was a shop in Ard Dubh or not – I can’t recollect one in Ard Dubh. There were two shops in Camusteel, and at least two shops in Milton, there was the tailors and the bakers, a general grocers shop and Dòmhnall Mòr had a shop as well, a grocer shop but he stocked some hardware and stuff as well. So there were five shops in Milton. And if you went beyond that up to the street to where the hotel is now, there was a grocer shop attached to that building. And there was the old post office and the hotel was a temperance hotel then. The lady ran the hotel and the husband ran the shop and he ran a van service doing deliveries daily as well. I used to own the shop which is now your granny’s house Kirsten, we owned the store and the shop and we had a van going round as well. There were quite a few shops around the coast too.

Bethany: Why did they close down?
Donald: Lack of population is the straight answer I think, and cars as well. More people had their own cars then and travel became easier and they didn’t have to depend on the vans coming round their doors, they could go away to Inverness or wherever, although it would take three to four hours to travel there and three to four hours to travel back.

Kirsten: Did people go to Kyle to get things?
Donald: Yes they did but they would go by sea, there was no Strome bypass so if you were going to go to Kyle from here you would have to go all the way to Drumnadrochit. In those days the Bealach road wasn’t tarred, there was no coast road so today’s cars wouldn’t do much on the Bealach because there was just two tracks where the wheels were and the centre was away up in the middle. If you had low slung cars like you do today, you were forever bursting sumps or something!

Bethany: Do you know anybody who owned the shops?
Donald: Well yes, I knew most of them.
Emilly: Apart from this school, were there any other schools in the area?
Donald: Yes, from one end of the parish to the other there were quite a number. There was a school in Milton at one time but I don’t remember it. There was a school in Kalnakill and a school in Arina. There was a school in Ardheslaig and at Uags. Tutors went round to Airigh-drishaig but I don’t think there was a school there. I think there were around 40 people at this school when I was here.

Emily: Was the stag’s head here then?
Donald: Yes, I think it was but I’m not sure that it was up there. There was also a glass cabinet with a wildcat and a rabbit under its paw, and a great northern diver. They are still here too!

Kirsten: What was your school uniform like?
Donald: We didn’t have a school uniform, it wasn’t heard of in these days. We had bare feet, and open-necked shirts and shorts. We used to come to school bare foot in the summer time. In the winter time we maybe couldn’t manage it! In the winter time we used to cycle on the ice at Milton loch, from one end of the loch to the other! We would cycle to school and we would cycle from one end of the loch to the other! It doesn’t freeze over now like what it used to, there used to be depths of ice on it. I remember one year when it started thawing it would take a while before it would break up because it was that thick, and even when it did start breaking up some of the chunks of ice were more than a foot thick.

Emily: And did you learn some Gaelic at school?
Donald: Yes, our headmaster was a Lewis man and he had Gaelic and he would talk Gaelic to us and he would give us lessons in Gaelic – a lot of it from the Bible. We did a bit of Gaelic, he wasn’t to blame that we weren’t allowed to speak Gaelic, it was the government.

Daniel: What sort of work did people do?
Donald: Work on the land mainly and fishing. Most people did both of them. They would fish for part of the year and work on the land the rest of the year. That’s how they made a living, a bit of fishing in the winter and in spring, summer and up to the autumn they would work on the land. Quite a few of them worked on the estate too...And they kept themselves alive by making butter and bread and everything like that and they would grow some potatoes and vegetables for themselves.
Daniel: Do you know any stories about Milton, Camusterrach or Camusteel?
Donald: You know the part at Milton which is called The Eagle’s Rock, do you know how it got its name, The Eagle’s Rock?
Daniel: No.
Donald: Well, legend has it that there was a woman working on a croft on Raasay with her baby lying in a bundle of hay on the croft beside her and she was just working away at the hay. And the eagle came and picked up the baby, flew across the sound with it and that’s where it landed with it, on the Eagle’s Rock and it’s been known as the Eagle’s Rock ever since. Somebody happened to see the eagle coming and managed to frighten the eagle away and the baby was alright. That just shows you how strong the eagle is.

Daniel: Were there any characters when you were doing your post round or do you have any stories about when you did the post round?
Donald: I couldn’t tell some of the stories! Och yes there were quite a number of characters, nearly every village had its character!

Daniel: Do you know any ghost stories about Milton?
Donald: I can’t think of any about Milton but I do know a story about a predecessor of mine in the post job, when there were no post vans and the post was delivered either on foot or with a pushbike with a carrier thing on the back. This man, he lived in Milton right enough and he was very scared of ghosts and he was scared of the dark actually. And there was a minister who used to live in the Clachan manse at the time and he sometimes wouldn’t be at home when the postman would be delivering the mail and the postman would see if he could try and find him somewhere on his route because he didn’t like going to the Clachan manse because it was just next door to the graveyard.

One night the minister was out but he was early and he was there before the postman had got the mail. At that time the mail was coming off the Stornoway boat at Milton pier and it had to be sorted out at the post office and then it was evening time when it was being delivered, the ferry didn’t arrive till four or five o’clock. Anyway this night, the postman met the minister and he asked him was he going home and he said “no I’m not going home, I won’t be home till late tonight, I’m doing quite a few visits so I’ll be late in getting home.” He said “but I left a window at the back open and whatever mail there is just put it in there.” “That’s fine” he said, “I’ll do that.” When the mails arrived George started on his round and there was mail for the minister and he made his way to Clachan. But the minister played a trick on him and the minister was not going to be as long out as he was saying he was and he had got home before the postman arrived with the mail but there were no lights or anything on in the manse. It would be just Tilly lamps or paraffin lamps that they had then. But anyway, the minister got into the room where the window was and he had a bucket of cold water in the thing beside him and he was there with his hand in this bucket of cold water and the postman arrived with the post. When he saw the postman putting his hand through the window he grabbed his hand with the wet, cold hand! You can guess yourselves what the postman did! I think the minister was a bit of a character himself!
An Lòn Bàn, Cal na Cille, Cuaig, Na Feàrrnan Mòra, Na Feàrrnan Beaga, Àirigh na Cruithneachd agus À’ Cheannmhor

Agallamhan còmhla ri Catriona NicIain agus Dòmhnall MacCumhais:
Eachdraidh Teaghlaich, Eachdraidh Ionadail, Sgoil, Gàidhlig agus Ainmean-àite, Ceòl, Tachartasan Ràitheil agus Sgeulachdan

Lonbain, Kalnakill, Cuaig, Fernmore, Fernbeg, Arinacrinachd and Kenmore

Interviews with Catherine Johnson and Donald MacCuish:
Family History, Local History, School, Gaelic and Place Names, Music, Seasonal Events and Stories
Agallamh còmhla ri Catriona NicIain
Interview with Catherine Johnson

Eachdraidh Teaghlaich
~ Family History

Emilly: Cuine agus carson a thàinig ur teaghlach dhan Cheannmhòir?
Catriona: Ùill, rugadh is thogadh mise anns a’ Cheannmhòir ach thàinig m’athair às na Hearadh agus mo mhàthair às Na Feàrnan Mòra air cost’ na Comraich. Thàinig teaghlach m’athair ann an 1924.

Emilly: When and why did your family come to Kenmore?
Catherine: Well, I was born and brought up in Kenmore but my father came from Harris and my mother came from Fearnmore on the Applecross coast. My father’s family came [to Kenmore] in 1924.

Emilly: Did your family have any special belongings that they really wanted to take with them when they came from Harris?
Catherine: Well tweed was one of the things, my granny was a weaver and she brought her expertise as it were. They were quite poor at that time and they came [to Kenmore] because there was more ground to grow their potatoes and vegetables and things.

Emilly: How did your family get to Kenmore?
Catherine: They came by boat.

Mrs McCowan: Do you know if there was a government arrangement to give land?
Catherine: I am not sure, I think it was through people knowing where there was a spot of land because I think when people came to Crowlin - that was a grant... And they settled there first and then they told others that there was a place in Toscaig and a place here in Kenmore, and a lot of them went to Portnalong in Skye at the same time - The MacLeods, were another lot of cousins.

Bronny: Dè an obair a bh’ agaibh?
Catherine: Bha mi ag obair ann an Ardsgoil a’ Phluic a’ coimhead an deidh clann a bha anns an ostail an sin. Bha mi ann an fichead bliadhna.

Bronny: What was your job?
Catherine: I worked in Plockton High School looking after children that were in the hostel. I was there for twenty years.

“…ach thàinig m’athair às na Hearadh agus mo mhàthair às Na Feàrnan Mòra air cost’ na Comraich”
Daniel: Can you tell us anything about Kenmore’s history?
Catherine: There are ten houses here now but there used to be a lot more houses at one time. Up to fifty people used to live in Kenmore. The Morrisons came and there were ten of them in the family and the MacCuishs likewise. There were a lot of young people in the village at the time, I’ve seen the school register at Arina and my two uncles went to school there when they came here. The school is closed now.

Bronny: Where did people go to church?
Catherine: They went to church in Arina or in Fearnmore, we used to have to walk to Fearnmore to the Church of Scotland.

Mrs McCowan: A lot of people in the First World War were so shocked by what they had experienced in the war that they were never able to cope and there was no provision for them, and a lot of them took to wandering.

Emily E: Was it the same families [of travelling folk] that came every year?
Catherine: There was Millers from Lochcarron and Stewarts and a lot of the Stewarts settled over in Plockton. In fact, the Free Church today, I don’t think it would be in Plockton if it wasn’t for them – lots of people go to it.

Robbie: How did you get the post?
Catherine: Well, the post came by boat from Shieldaig if the weather was good and it would come by motorbike if it was wild.

Mrs McCowan: Well my uncle said that there was a huge storm and that’s what blew the sand up there.
Kirsten: Where did you go to school?
Catherine: I went to Arina school and then to Dingwall Academy.

Emily E: Did everyone from the area go to school in Dingwall?
Catherine: Yes at that time and they stayed in the hostel at Tulloch that's now the hotel...you had to sit your intelligence test and your qualifying examination in those days, one determined your class and one determined your school I think.

Kirsten: Who taught you when you went to school and what subjects did you do?
Catherine: Mrs Gillanders taught me and we would do the usual arithmetic, English and some nature studies. We did crafts as well, raffia and things like that and some knitting, a bit of history and a bit of geography. There was religious education, but we never did Gaelic. I didn't learn to read Gaelic until much later. I had to learn to speak English when I went to school.

Kirsten: How many children were in the school when you were there?
Catherine: There were nine when I first began there and there was just me and my sister when I left, then my sister came to school here. She was a year on her own, then she came to stay with my aunt and went to Applecross School here.

Bethany: Did the teacher in your school speak Gaelic?
Catherine: She could understand a few words but she couldn’t speak it fluently. I couldn't speak any English when I went to school.

Kirsten: Where do children in Kenmore go to school now?
Catherine: They would go to school in Shieldaig and the senior ones would go to stay in the hostel in Plockton but there are no children in Kenmore at the moment. It used to be at one time they would go to Gairloch to school.

Bethany: What does Kenmore mean?
Catherine: It's a headland out into the loch, it's À’ Cheannmhòr in Gaelic or Ceann Mhòr [big headland].

Bethany: Did many people speak Gaelic in Kenmore?
Catherine: Everyone spoke Gaelic in Kenmore when I went to school. My parents used to speak English if they didn’t want me to know what they were talking about!

Robbie: Can you tell us anything about the song ’Chi Mi ’n Tìr’ [I see the land]?
Catherine: “Chi mi ’n Tìr san robh mi nam bhalach” was written by our neighbour Iain MacCuish. I'm not sure if he wrote it when he was leaving Harris to come to Kenmore or was it when he went to sea. I don’t think it was known for a while after then but it’s a common song now. It's a lovely song.

Daniel: Did you ever play any instruments as a child?
Catherine: I didn’t play any instruments because a lot of people thought playing music was not really the right thing to do...I remember asking if I could do some piano lessons at Dingwall my mother said “Oh no no, that will put you on the wrong road!”...But my father could play the mouth organ beautifully and he and my mother were both excellent singers and I’m quite sure that if they had had the chance that young people get nowadays then they would have been very good.

Daniel: Did anyone else play instruments and how did they learn?
Catherine: Not really, we got singing in school but that was all, it was very basic and it was usually psalms, we didn’t have any music at all. I don’t think any of the people who were with me at that time played anything.
Agallamh còmhla ri Dòmhnall MacCuish
Interview with Donald MacCuish

Robbie: Where do you come from?
Donald MacCuish: I come from Kenmore, a village on the north coast of Applecross.

Robbie: Were your family originally from Kenmore?
Donald: No, my father and mother came from the island of Harris and settled in Kenmore in 1923. I was born and brought up in Kenmore and have lived for most of my life in Kenmore apart from six years I think, when I was away for National Service.

Robbie: Have you noticed lots of changes in the area since you were younger?
Donald: Oh yes there has been a big lot of changes since I was born in Kenmore quite a number of years ago... The biggest change was when the road came round the coast, that was the biggest change I saw taking place. When the road came to Kenmore in the 70s, we got an engine and we got electricity in the house but it was four or five years after that we got [mains] electricity, that must have been in the 80s. That was just a few of the changes but at that time there were big changes right round. I remember at Applecross the Loch Seaforth or the Loch Nevis used to come in at the bay here and I remember when the Loch Toscaig ran, the ferry ran from Toscaig to Kyle.

Kirsten: Dè an obair a bh’ agaibh?
Dòmhnall: Uill, nuair a dh’fhàg mi an sgòil bha mi ag iasgach giomach, sin a rinn mi gus an robh mi ochd bliadhna deug gus an robh agam ri National Service a dhèanamh. Nuair a thàinig mi a-mach às an arm, bha bràthair m’ a’thar anns na taighean-­sholais... agus fhuaire e obair dhomh san taigh-solais agus bha mi an sin airson ceithir bliadhna... An deidh sin thàinig mi dhachaigh agus thòisich mi ag iasgach a’­­rithist. Bhò chionn càrr fichead bliadhna bha mi ag obair air a’ chounty, bhithinn a’ clearadh sneachd shuas air a’ Bhealach agus bha mi an sin airson còig bliadhna deug gus an tàinig e orm retireadh airson cha robh mi gu math.

Kirsten: What job did you have?
Donald: Well, when I left school I was a lobster fisherman, that’s what I did until I was eighteen until I was called out to do my National Service. When I came out of the army, my uncle [worked] in the lighthouses... and he got me a job in the lighthouses and I was there for four years... After that I came home and I started fishing again. For more than fifteen years I worked at the county, I would clear the snow up on the Bealach and I was there for fifteen years until I had to retire because I wasn’t well.
Kirsten: Can you tell us about the history of Kenmore?
Donald: Well, it was a fishing village and crofting. At that time we had horses doing the croft work in my early days. In fact the first time I ever came over to Applecross was with a white horse we had to get shod...There used to be a smithy here, when the horses were working, ploughing and that, we had to fix them with iron shoes. They say it's very lucky to have a horse shoe! In the spring of the year we used to sell our beasts to the estate, and we used to drive them across the hill and the estate had them on the glen and that, and they sold them...

There used to be sales, before my day I think, in Lochcarron. If you wanted to send stock to market in Dingwall you had to take them to Strathcarron and truck them there or drive them to Dingwall...If we had calves, very often if they milked the cows they tried to get rid of the calves when they were three or four weeks old and the way you did that was you put them inside a bag with its head out and tied it tight and put it on the bus at Shieldaig! And that wasn't so long ago! I used to take them up on the boat, and have them in the bag and then put them on the bus with anything else, fish or lobsters or anything, it all went to the bus to Strathcarron... and they were sold in Dingwall... All the lobsters we caught were packed in sawdust and sent away on the bus to Strathcarron and from there they went to Billingsgate...We lived very much off the croft in those days, there was six of us of a family but even then people were starting to move away...even away back, because of the lack of the road people left the place.

Kirsten: Did it snow a lot more when you were younger than it does now?
Donald: Yes, well on the Bealach anyway...when the road came to Kenmore, that's when I started work for the county, up until then I was self-employed. They were looking for someone to drive a snow plough between Kenmore and Shieldaig so I applied for that...but then we had to go to the Bealach to help with the clearing...and the snow was a lot heavier than it has been the last few years because at that time it was nothing for the Bealach to be blocked for five weeks or six weeks at a time.

Emilly: Did you have a favourite subject?
Donald: Yes to get out of school! Well, I think arithmetic was maybe my best but I wasn't a great scholar – I was too fond of getting out of school to look after the sheep and that, rather than to attend to my studies.

Emilly: Where did you go to school?
Donald: I went to Arinacrínachd High! [laughing]

Emilly: What subjects did you do at school?
Donald: We did English and arithmetic, geography and history. I liked history. That was the main things.

“If you wanted to send stock to market in Dingwall you had to take them to Strathcarron and truck them there or drive them to Dingwall....”
Bethany: What does Kalkakill mean?
Donald: It means Call na Ciste or where the coffin was lost. I think that’s what it means because I think the story goes that there was a ship passing here and somebody died and they landed at Kalkakill and buried the remains in the hope that they would come and collect it on their way back. When they came back they couldn’t find the place. That is what I was told.

Bethany: What does Arinacrinachd mean?
Donald: That means place of the barley. Àirigh is a sheiling out on the moor where people stayed and took their cattle and it means sheiling of the barley – I never saw much barley in it!

Bethany: Do you speak Gaelic in your community?
Donald: Well, I speak Gaelic to my wife and the family too, when they were your age they could speak Gaelic but they can’t speak Gaelic now.

Bethany: Why do you think that less people speak Gaelic now?
Donald: I’m afraid that it’s a dying language, because it’s a difficult language. I can’t write Gaelic and I’m not that good at reading Gaelic either but I can understand it and I can speak it. But when I was young everybody you met here spoke to you in Gaelic, anywhere in Applecross or round the coast and you could tell when that person spoke, you could tell where that person came from...It’s a wonderful language, very expressive, far more expressive than the English language.

Emily E: Can you tell us anything about the song ‘Chì Mi ’n Tìr’?
Donald: My father composed it...that was before he left Harris, before they came to Kenmore. He was sailing in the merchant navy for a number of years and when he was passing Harris, you know, in sight of Harris that was when he composed ‘Chì Mi ’n Tìr’. He composed other songs too but I don’t know them. He composed one or two after he came to Kenmore as well.

Emily E: And when would he have composed it?
Donald: Well when he would be in his mid twenties. He came to Kenmore when he was...about thirty, so it would have been after the First World War [when he composed it].

Emily E: Can you tell us anything about the song ‘Chì Mi ’n Tìr’?
Bronny: What happened on Halloween?
Donald: [laughs] Well, some people used to get very annoyed you know at the young people doing daft things, tricks and things! Foolish things like climbing up the chimney and stuffing the chimney! And the poor bodachs [old men] would get up! There was one man here at Applecross who was getting his windows broken very often and he was getting very annoyed and this day they tapped a big sheet of polythene round the door and then somebody dropped a pane of glass and they just dropped it on the road and this man was wild! And he jumped out and landed in the polythene! He got himself wrapped in the polythene!

Bronny: Did you get an Easter egg on Easter?
Donald: Yes, sometimes we did if we were lucky.

Bronny: Was there any special traditions at weddings, Christenings or funerals?
Donald: No I don’t think so. At Christenings the service was just in the church and I don’t think there was anything special after that. The family might have a special dinner maybe... As long as I can remember round our way, people getting married went to Inverness or Strathcarron and got married there.

Bronny: What happened at Hogmanay?
Donald: Well, we stayed up until twelve o’clock, most people did and then we just went from house to house.

Daniel: Can you tell us any ghost stories?
Donald: Och I never seen anything worse than myself! You don’t see them now, I think cars have put them out of existence! I remember walking home myself one night and on that path, between Cuaig and Ardheslaig, and it was very late at night and as I was climbing up the hill I was seeing this white thing moving down the other side of the hill and I was thinking “What’s this?” and I was walking along and then I stopped, and this white thing stopped! And well my heart nearly stopped too! But it turned out to be glass on the telephone pole and the moon was shining across on this and as I was walking up the way, this thing was going down the way! And I thought to myself I’ll have to find out what this is or I will never come here again! And I stopped and got an even bigger fright when the thing stopped!

I heard many a story about spooks. There was one, a fisherman and you know they played on it you know, they had plenty of time. Just below the point in front of the house, they were fishing for lobsters and they saw this woman coming down with a basket on her arm and they thought she’d be wanting the ferry so they went down to the shore and the woman disappeared and they were quite sure that there would be somebody playing a trick but there was nothing! In the olden days they would spend their time yarning away, spooky stories and some people believed it but you never hear of it now or anybody seeing anything...and the sìthean [faeries] too but they never came near me!

“In the olden days they would spend their time yarning away, spooky stories and some people believed it…”

An Lòn Bàn (The Fair Meadow)
Lonbain
Drawing by Emilly
Com-pàirtichean na Fèise
‘s iad a’ dèanamh obair-ealain

Mar phàirt de Phróiseact nan Tasglann, rinn com-pàirtichean na Fèise obair-ealain a tha ag innse sgeulachd an òrain ionadail “Gog Gog”. Chithear an obair-ealain ann an Talla-choimhearsnachd na Comraich.

Fèis Participants doing some artwork

As part of the Archiving Project Fèis participants made a wall hanging depicting the story told in the local Gaelic song “Gog Gog”. The artwork can be seen in Applecross Village Hall.
Fèis a’ Bhealaich - Our People and Places
Fèis a’ Bhealaich: Our People and Places
is one of a series of booklets produced by Féisean nan Gàidheal as part of The Archiving Project where Féis participants are collecting and recording songs, tunes, stories and folklore from their own areas.

Further details about the project can be found at:
www.feisean.org/archivingproject

“Le bhith ag obair a-measg Fèisean ann an iomadh coimhearsnachd, bha mi riamh den bheachd gun robh còir aig na com-
pàirtichean barrachd fhaighinn a-mach mu dhualchais na sgìre aca flein - na sgeulachdan agus an t-seòrsa cainnt a th’ aig
na daoine - cho math ris na h-òrain agus an ceòl. Tha mi air leth toilichte gu bheil sin air tighinn troimhe anns a’ phróiseact
luchmhór seo agus tha mi an dochas gum bi com-pàirtichean aig Fèis a’ Bhealaich a’ dearnamh feum den stuth a chaidh a
chruimneachadh airson iomadh bhadhma fhathast agus gum bi iad a’ cur ris an tasglann a chaidh a stèidheadadh.

Art MacCarmaig, Stiùiriche, Féisean nan Gàidheal

Working with Féisean in many communities, I was always of the opinion that participants should find out more about the
heritage of their own area - the stories and the language of the people - as well as the songs and the music. I am extremely
happy that is what is coming through this valuable project and I hope that Fèis a’ Bhealaich participants will make use of
the materials collected for many years to come and will add to the archive that has been established.”

Arthur Cormack, Director, Féisean nan Gàidheal