



# EILEAN SHONA

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS  
AND  
ANECDOTES

by

IAN BROOKS

## Introduction

Moidart is one of the most picturesque regions of the Western Highlands, boarded on the east by Loch Shiel and stretching across to the coast in the west and from Ardnamurchan and Sunart in the south to Morar in the north. Within this small area are stark contrasts of terrain – there are the flat low level peat bogs at the mouth of Loch Shiel called Moss, so called after the unusual and rare mosses that flourish there.

Along the coast on the eastern side there are numerous small rocky islands with lush foliage flourishing from the effects of the warm Gulf Stream, and then there is the spectacular mountain range of Roshven (Rois–Bhein) 2895ft rising from the shore with its white sandy beaches across to Loch Shiel.

Within this variety of glorious and enchanting scenery there is an abundance of historical interest from 1000AD to the present day. Especially so during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century when the strong Catholic faith of its inhabitants and the influence of the Clanranalds and their supporters provided support to Charles Edward Stuart and the events leading up to the Jacobite rising in 1745.

Eilean Shona, my mother's home, is a small island at the entrance to Loch Moidart in the south west of the region. My interest in her family took me to the thriving settlement of Mingarry, just 3 miles from Loch Moidart, to visit the parish's small Catholic chapel. Some years ago a member of the family was privileged to be allowed to peruse and record extracts of appropriate entries from the parish 'Record of Births', which date back to the 1700's. From these extracts I have established that Eilean Shona has been the home of my mother's family – the Kennedy's – for at least 200 years.

Sadly there are no family records of their memories or recollections of their life on Eilean Shona and today there is only one surviving member of the family, my Aunt Ena, now in her 86<sup>th</sup> year, living in Fort William.

In the following pages I have recorded my personal memories and experiences of my visits to Eilean Shona during the 1940's and 1950's. Some of these memories are tinged with much sadness but they reflect the strong emotional ties of my mother's family and to the places and people she knew so well.

There will be many others who are far better qualified than me who could write about Eilean Shona and the inhabitants, but I hope that my sparse memories of 50 years ago will provide a little insight to the Kennedy's lives and their environment at that time.

I have endeavoured to piece together these recollections for the personal interest of my sister Diane and brother Stuart, in the hope that our children, and their successors, will cherish the family name of Kennedy, and occasionally reflect on their Highland predecessors who suffered a meagre and often lonely existence on the remote and wild but beautiful island of Eilean Shona.

Ian Brooks

Horsington  
July 2006





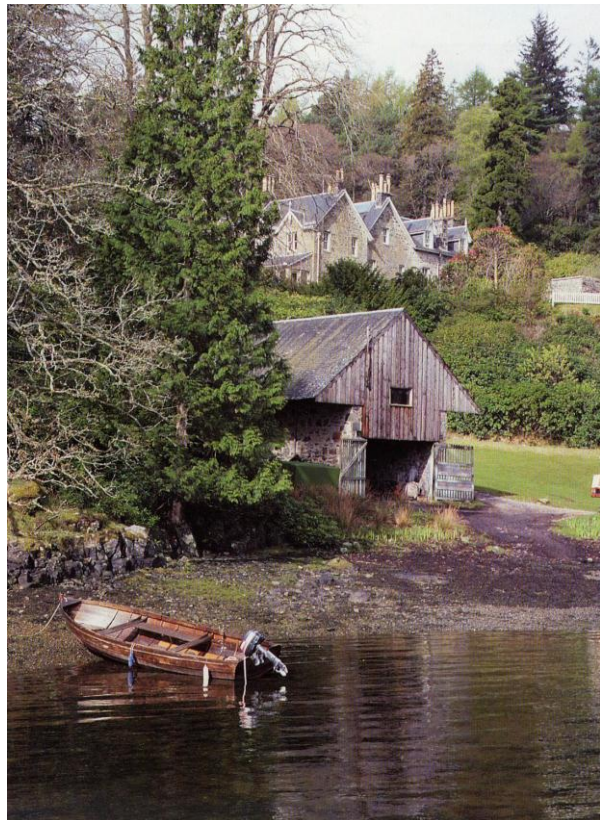
## Eilean Shona

Eilean Shona is set in the entrance of Loch Moidart separated from the mainland by two narrow channels. It is rugged and rocky, covered in luscious undergrowth, is approximately two miles by one mile in area. The highest point is Beinn a Bhaillidh (862ft) with five other peaks of over 600ft. From the tops of these hills there are spectacular views of Rhum, Eigg and Skye in the west and as far as Ben Nevis in the east.

The whole area of Moidart is steeped in history. It is in the heart of the Catholic Clanranald territory from where Charles Edward Stuart gained much of his support for the Jacobite uprising in 1745. The ruins of Castle Tioram, seat of the Macdonald's of Clanranald is in the south channel just off Dorlin and almost opposite Eilean Shona House.

The last fifty years has seen an expansion in forestry and a reduction in sheep farming as well as the introduction of enterprises in fish farming and oyster cultivation. The main wooded areas are to the east and rear of Eilean Shona House, including a Pinetum with a fine collection of rare and specimen trees planted from about 1858 onwards by Captain Swinburn, (he owned Eilean Shona at that time and built Eilean Shona House), and his successor Spencer Thompson.

At the time of my visits to Eilean Shona there were a number of crofts in isolated places on the island. These crofts were occupied by long-standing inhabitants; some of them had been in the same family for many generations. These were true crofters whose life was very much the same then as it had been for over 100 years, each with its own livestock, (usually 2 cows and a few sheep). Peat was cut from the peat bogs high in the hills and there was usually a walled vegetable patch, (for potatoes), cut into the nearest piece of cultivatable land.



*Eilean Shona House and Boat house*

As people died or moved to the mainland the crofts became derelict and degenerated into shelters for the sheep. Thankfully in recent years some of the crofts have been renovated to become part of a commercial holiday letting business, thus re-establishing not only the long history of these crofts but also of the people who lived in them.

However, it is easy to be taken in by the extraordinary beauty and ambience of Eilean Shona during the summer and early autumn when the colours of the landscape are at their best, and the sea is as colourful and crystal clear as the seas in the Caribbean. The remainder of the year is usually wet and overcast, the winds often reach gale force and the seas are rough. The winters are long, dull and depressing and movement around the island and across the loch is uncomfortable. On top of all this there is little profitable work available to earn a reasonable wage. It is therefore not surprising that my mother's generation left Eilean Shona to seek a better life on the mainland.

Today it must be much different. Electricity, motor boats, telecommunications, radio and TV must make life for the residents on the island bearable and for the visitors to the island – “idyllic” – but the means of making a reasonable living as a resident must still be very difficult.

## Geneology

The earliest available records show that my great great grandfather, Alexander Kennedy of Kinloch Moidart, was born circa 1780. He married Kathryn MacEachen and the marriage produced five children: John, Alexander, Kathryn, Angus and Ruari. The eldest child John, (born 1824), was my great grandfather and his marriage to Harriet MacIntyre of Kinloch Moidart produced eight children: (Jessie 1863, Alexander 1864, Peter 1866, Joanne 1869, Anne 1871, Angus 1874, Hector 1879 and John 1879). Peter was my grandfather and his marriage to Mary-Anne MacIntyre, (the daughter of Gregor MacIntyre of Weem, Aberfeldy, Perthshire and Margaret Smith of Kinloch Moidart), produced nine children of which Marion was my mother. The nine children, all born on Eilean Shona:

John	(1898)	died 1925
Gregor	(1900)	died 1968
Harriet	(1902)	died 1965
Angus	(1904)	died 1976
Marion	(1908)	died 1968
Jessie	(1911)	died 1969
Alexander	(1913)	died 1977
Margaret	(1915)	died 1948
Ena	(1917)	

## Marion Kennedy

My mother, Marion Kennedy, rarely spoke of Eilean Shona, whenever she did she referred to it as a wild and inhospitable place where normal life was hard and unforgiving, and she regarded the island as only suitable for a holiday in mid-summer.

With the rest of the siblings she attended Eilean Shona Primary School, a modern building for the time, situated near to Barramore on the north west of the island. During the early 1900's there were numerous children on the island, (large but few families), which provided for a thriving and busy school. The school was reached by long, rough and difficult tracks over the hills from all parts of the island.

It was normal in the Highlands for the girls on leaving school, (at the age of 14), to be employed in the 'big house' as well as hotels and shooting lodges, as cooks, maids and on other general household duties. It was no different for my mother. At the age of 14 she left school and started employment 'in service' at Eilean Shona House, the home of the Howard de Waldens, she subsequently moved on to Glen Moidart House continuing 'in service' to Miss Lees. In her early 20's she left Glen Moidart with the Lees and travelled to England to Whittlebury Lodge, Towcester, in Northamptonshire, (the early 1930's), where she met and married my father, Harry Brooks, of Welford in Northamptonshire.

My mother was a fluent Gaelic speaker but as the years passed she very rarely used it. However, I do recall she would occasionally sing Gaelic lullabies to my brother and sister as babies, songs that feature in Ceildh's today. However, when she was with her brothers and sisters she would automatically and unhesitatingly converse in the Gaelic- in most instances this would be after many years of not doing so, but time did not erode her fluency. She was always at her happiest when with her own family, and it was noticeable that there was always much laughter when they conversed in the Gaelic.



*Marion (Minnie) (1908 - 1968) Photograph taken in 1952 aged 44*

## The Early 1900's

During the early 1900's travel to and from Eilean Shona was a major task (and this situation prevailed well into the 1950's). Visitors to the island were rare but when they did arrive they caused inquisitive interest. Occasionally there were distinguished visitors to Eilean Shona House and my mother recounted to me that she remembered meeting James Barrie during his stay there at the invitation of the Howard de Waldens. This was during the summer of 1920, (my mother at that time was aged 12), but it was not until some years later that she learnt that James Barrie, (by then Sir James Barrie), was a well known author and playwright. His published letters show that he wrote most of his play, 'A Kiss for Cinderella', whilst at Eilean Shona. At that time my mother also recalled how she became acquainted with a young boy, slightly younger than her, who subsequently became Lord Howard de Walden, (now deceased). He was resident in Eilean Shona House with his parents.

The difficulties experienced in travelling to and from Eilean Shona were mentioned by James Barrie in his letters written whilst on Eilean Shona. The following is extracted from, 'Letters By J.M.Barrie', by Viola Meynell, published in 1942. These provide not only an insight into the difficulties of travel during the early 1900's but also the persistent inclement weather, which was so disliked by my mother.

**'To Stanway' (Barrie's home in Gloucestershire)**

**Eilean Shona 13<sup>th</sup> August 1920**

*We have now been on the island a whole night, a wild rocky romantic island it is too, and if I had Michael of yours with me, as I do wish I had, we should have made great play of putting this in a bottle and letting it be picked up a la Crichton castaways. It might have reached you almost as soon, for the first five miles of its journey takes the better part of a day apparently as it lies at Acharacle a night before it sets out on the longer but easier part of its journey. You won't get it, I can see, before Sunday. Mothersil! I scorn your implication. All out sea-faring was on an inland loch as calm as the Serpentine and not much wider, though there were a score or so of miles, and we had to stop now and again to get a bottle of milk from a rowing boat, or give a sack of flour to another. All through the 'Pretender's' country - we lunched where he raised his standard and round about here he hid in caves when his sun went so quickly down. The sun has gone down for all who used to be great hereabouts - we look out on an aged keep where the last of the clan Ronald, said farewell to his last acre.*

*This is a very lovely spot, almost painfully so. 'I am never merry' when I see sweet Scotia, or never merry any more, and have chosen a room where I can hide from the scenery. I should like to emerge with Simon in my arms, thus we could defy it together, laugh at it and still keep our feet. But for want of him I am better placidly peeping out on the rose garden to which I am still equal. It almost taketh the breath away to find so perfectly appointed a retreat on these wild shores. The Ritz could not do us better. Such bathrooms! Such a tennis court (the loveliest I should think in Britain - how could anyone with eyes let them rest for a moment on a ball!) Such boats. There is a tame lamb that would trot with*



*Michael everywhere and lean against his legs when he stood still. Appliances to answer every thought. It is certainly a might fine present the Howard de Walden's have made us, or rather that you have passed on to us. Superb as is the scene from the door, Michael, who has already been to the top of things, says its nought to what is revealed there – all the western isles of Scotland lying at our feet. A good spying-ground for discovering what really became of Mary Rose. Speaking of her, it was all fixed up before I left London that Nesbitt should play Harry and Simon in USA. He is in great feather, as his salary jumps from £8 or so a week to £50, but he doesn't know that this was done mainly to please you, as indeed it was. So please be rather elated.*

*Picturesque outlooks do not an Eden make, and I daresay I shall be thinking with Dr Johnson that the best road in Scotland is the road out of it. However, this month will pass like all the others and a good deal of loneliness won't blot out a single memory of your visit. As for going long walks, the island nips the project rather though it is some eight miles round. I shall sally to the mainland at times in a boat, and set off alone for Ardnamurchan and other toothbreakers. The publishers clamour for more plays and I have brought 'Kiss for Cinderella' with me with the pious of preparing it for them. It seems trumpery work. I like your wanting me to get started on a book but I don't have any book inside of me to transcribe. Don't think I haven't gone a-fishing for it. I am not naturally an idler, it was always a glory to me to be at work, but I can get hooked on to nothing that seems worth playing.*

*It will probably be, as often before, that I shall kick up a pebble someday, and make more of it than every a man made before. I am almost a genius at the occasional pebble. Funnily built man – especially to come from Scotland. Oh, how I grin at myself at times, but with the wrong side of the face. Did I ever tell you of the philippic I once wrote (anonymously) against J.M.B.? It appeared in Henley's paper, and some of my admirers were so indignant with him that they withdrew their subscriptions.*

*Lots of books here (finely bound) but last night I read in your Shakespeare book which travelled north without a ticket. It was the next best thing to listening to you in the chimney corner.*

*Don't you try to be funny about writing once a fortnight. I dined with Freyberg and Mason before I left, and B.F. was at his best, talked in a way that made me proud of him fare into the small hours. He didn't think there was much chance of his getting here, for which I'm sorry.*

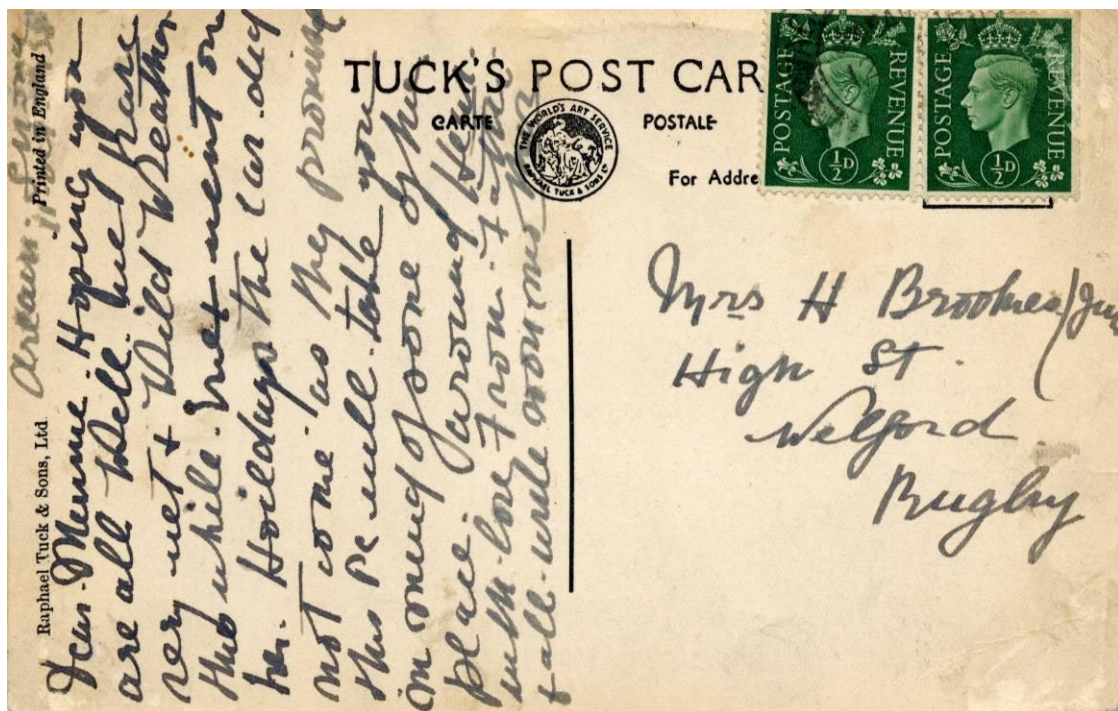
**17<sup>th</sup> August 1920**

*I had hoped to have a letter ere now, but the post has gone again. I do hope all is well with you. You get more delicate at a distance. The island has changed from sun to rain, and we have now had about 60 hours of it so wet that you get soaked if you dart across the lawn. It's dry for a moment and anon I will be observed – or rather I won't be, for there is no one to observe me – playing clock golf by my lonely self. I am mostly by my lonely self, and a little island is not the best place for strenuous exercise in wet weather, the roads – or rather the road – ending as soon as it sets off and the heather is so wet and slippery that as you ascent you suddenly disappear from view. The others are out sea-fishing with Jock Oliver and Audrey Lucas who have arrived, and the party is merrier without me.*

*I have got started on the 'Kiss for Cinderella', rather like digging up the dead and holding an autopsy, but you are requested not to shout at the performer as he seems to be doing his best. You shall have your way about those spectacles but as for the sculpting of me, woman forbear. Michael has been drawing more sketches of me, and they are more than enough. He has a diabolic aptitude for finding my worst attributes, so bad that I indignantly deny them, then I furtively examine myself in the privacy of my chamber, and lo, there they are.*

*I enclose two letters to answer. The one about Mary Rose – refer him to the manager, Haymarket; the other to the committee of the Society of Playactors. Some other dull things I have answered or destroyed. One from a Californian lady says she had such a nice letter from you that she is encouraged to write more fully (and she does too). You should read Enid Bagnold's 'Happy Foreigner', very good, and with one chapter called 'The River' which seems to be rather fine romance. There are some pretty things about love in it, very delicate and freshly done as if they had come flying out of a nice mind. I am writing to Beb about his poems, which have been forwarded. Simon comes handsomely out of them, but I think the 'Village Sermon' is easily the best, and a very fine thing, 'thoughts that voluntarily move harmonious numbers.'*

*Benger-time is the quietest hour of the day here, everyone else long in bed, and I can't even fly to the bottle as water is our only drink – water and occasional two tablespoonfuls of my sleeping draught, as I have not yet got the hang of sleeping well yet on islands. However, I am very well. I do hope I shall have a letter tomorrow.*



*Postcard from my Grandmother to Mother in 1938 (NB the weather!)*

I was taken to Eilean Shona by my parents in the mid 1930's but I have no recollection of the visit. At that time my grandparents were living at Arean, a croft on an isolated hillside about one mile west of Eilean Shona House. My grandfather not only tended his croft but also he was the boat-keeper for the Howard de Waldens and he maintained and skippered their yachts as well as carrying out a numerous other estate duties. Their large family of nine children attended Eilean Shona School,

however, the school leaving age was 14 and most of them started work in mundane jobs until they left the island, still at a very young age, to seek work on the mainland, often as far away as Glasgow.

The children's visits to their parents became very joyous but emotional occasions and, because of the difficult and expensive travel to the island, the visits were infrequent. In their teens and early years it was quite apparent that none of them had much affection for Eilean Shona – but this changed as they grew older. My grandfather died in 1944.

We made two more visits in the 1940's. The second visit was the most poignant because it was to attend the funeral of my mother's sister, Margaret. Margaret was the youngest one of the family and had left Eilean Shona for Glasgow to take up a nursing career. She had established herself very successfully and was appointed as the Nursing Sister in charge of the TB Ward of Stobhill Hospital in Glasgow. Sadly she contracted the disease herself and died in 1948 at the age of 38.

## **A Highland Funeral (1948)**

It was Margaret's wish that she be buried on the Green Isle, (Eilean Fhianain), in Loch Shiel. The Green Isle is a short distance from Acharacle where Loch Shiel begins to narrow to become the River Shiel and then continues on until the waters enter the sea at Dorlin (Loch Moidart). The Green Isle is the resting-place of other members of the family but it has its importance as a burial ground for more than 1000 years. A resume of the Green Isle's intriguing history is covered in a separate and subsequent section.

Margaret's final journey started from Glasgow, our journey started from Rugby in Warwickshire. The journey was extraordinary, particularly as it was only 3 years after the Second World War and Britain had not recovered from the war years. The journey from Rugby to Glasgow was mainly uneventful except every train and every station was crowded with military personnel. The trains travelling north were crowded with soldiers of the Scottish regiments, those travelling south with soldiers of the English regiments. At Crewe all trains travelling between London and Scotland and vice versa stopped for locomotive changes and 'wheel tapping'. This took about twenty minutes and thus allowing time for passengers to use the platform buffets – hence there was total pandemonium – not unlike a military landing, when a north and south train stopped at the same time – as was the case when we were travelling north.

The journey from Glasgow to the Green Isle and then on to Eilean Shona is worth recording because it typifies the protracted journey necessary to reach the remote parts of the Western Highlands at that time.

The West Highland Railway from Glasgow to Fort William was opened in 1894 with the Fort William to Mallaig extension in 1901. The Mallaig train, headed by two locomotives, departed early morning from the Glasgow Queen Street Station, thus allowing travellers to the islands to connect with MacBrayne steamers at Oban, Fort William and Mallaig.

On our arrival at Queen Street the journey became a very sad occasion. We met up with other members of the family and received Margaret's coffin. The coffin was placed in the guards van at the rear of the Mallaig train with calm and courtesy by the LNER staff. So began a slow but unforgettable journey to the Highlands.

From Glasgow the train made its way westward along the northern side of the River Clyde, (the first stop was Singer – a dedicated station for the sewing machine manufacturers), through Dumbarton and Craigendoran to Helensburgh. The train then wound its way around the hillside above Gareloch where the ships of the Reverse Fleet could be seen berthed in the loch. There were many warships in the loch, all of them 'paid off' after the war. Notably there were three battleships, HMS Anson, HMS Howe and HMS King George V. At the head of the loch the train passed the ship breaking yard of Shandon – the ultimate resting place for the fine vessels of war.

From Gareloch the line proceeds high above Loch Leng with precipitous slopes plunging straight down into the water and then slowly climbs up to Glen Douglas and on to the western shores of Loch Lomond. Arrachar and Tarbet are the next places of call where hikers and climbers alight to spend time on the 'Rest and be Thankful' mountain. At Crianlarich the train separates, one part proceeding to Oban in the west, we continue northwards. There was a twenty minute stay at Crianlarich to enable passengers to use the platform refreshment buffet. As we left Crianlarich there became a distinct change in scenery. The hills became barren and windswept, the railway takes a long sweeping turn round the Glen of Tyndrum, then around the horseshoe bend where from any carriage window both ends of the train can be seen. The last call before proceeding on to the long steep gradient over Rannoch Moor is, Bridge of Orchy. The journey to Rannoch, (summit 1400ft above sea level), is slow and there was time to view the varied natural terrain of the moor – at that time Rannoch Moor was regarded as one of the most desolate and roadless areas in Europe. The surface of the Moor is blotched with ditches filled with dark water, and in the worst places sections of the line are entirely supported by logs which act as a raft over the soft peaty ground. At various points the remains of trenches dug by soldiers in the Uprising of 1745 could be seen.

On leaving Rannoch the train gathers speed, past Courour, proceeds along Loch Treig, often within 3ft of a 200ft drop, until it descends to water level at the head of the loch. Prior to reaching Spean Bridge the track proceeds around the crescent of the Monessie Gorge where the line runs along a ledge half way up the right hand side wall, below are a jumbled mass of granite rocks – a spectacle of nature's art.



At Fort William the train arrives alongside the MacBrayne steamer pier. This pier was to be the source of much more sadness in 1950 when my mother's sister Ena's young son Peter, aged 5, was tragically found drowned in the water at the base of the pier. At Fort William the carriages are serviced, the locomotives changed, (the front of the train becomes the rear), and then proceeds to Mallaig via Loch Lochy and Glenfinnan. Later in 1975 Fort William station was moved to the East End of the town with new roads and car parks in place of the old station.

Glenfinnan was the start of the final stage of our journey. The coffin was taken out of the guards van, placed onto a two wheel porters cart and pulled from the station, high on a hill, down a steep and twisting road to the pier at the head of Loch Shiel, a journey of about one mile. At that time the pier was beside the Fort William road and adjacent to the Prince Charles Monument.



*Prince Charles' Monument 2003*



*Glenfinnan Viaduct and Prince Charles' Monument in 1936*

The monument, a solitary tower, was surrounded by heather and scrub, with free and unrestricted access. I remember climbing the stone steps within the monument with my Uncle Alex, (my mother's brother), and standing face to face with the statue of Bonnie Prince Charlie at the top. There was no commercialism or visitor's centre then.

The Loch Shiel boat – the M.V. Clanranald – arrived about midday. Margaret's coffin was placed above deck on the stern of the vessel. At 2pm the Clanranald sailed for Acharacle, a three hour journey down the loch stopping at various isolated settlements on the way, mostly to disembark stores and mail.

At about 4.30pm the Clanranald arrived off the Green Isle, where it was met by my Great Uncle Angus and other close relatives. Margaret's coffin was lowered over the side onto a rowing boat and taken to a small jetty on the Green Isle in preparation for her final resting-place.



*The Green Isle as seen from Dalelia*

The internment took place on this lonely windswept isle amongst many graves, many of them ancient, all overgrown and long forgotten.

The Clanranald had by now proceeded on its short remaining journey to Archaracle. After the funeral service and internment we were taken by rowing boat to Dalelia and then by car, (most of them 1930's vintage), to Castle Tioram. We were then rowed across Loch Moidart to Eilean Shona to stay with my grandmother.



*Margaret's Internment*



My grandmother had by this time become almost immobile and was unable to attend Margaret's funeral. Following the death of my grandfather in 1944 she moved from Areen to the Shore House, (now known as Double Cottage).



*From left to right – Great Uncle Angus (AT), Ian, Duncan, Alastair Smith and Uncle Alex*



## Arean



*Arean in the early 1950's*



The croft at Arean was my grandparents home from about 1890, (probably much earlier), in which they raised their family of nine children, until my grandmother moved to the Shore House in the 1940's.



I have no recollection of Arean as an active home even though I was there with my parents as a very young child. During a visit in 1953 I spent a lot of time around Arean, which by then was a derelict building. The croft was but a shell, but still with its corrugated iron roof, and had become a shelter for sheep. There remained the fresh water well about 50 yards from the croft down towards the boat landing. It was overgrown but scallop shells, from which you could drink the cold, clear, peat tainted water, laid hidden under the heather surround the well. This was the main source of water for the family and I am sure it must be there today.

At the turn of the century it was a highland tradition that on the death of a boat owner the boat was drawn up on to the beach and left forever until nature consumes it. On the shore at Arean were the remains of my Uncle John's small fishing boat, (my mother's eldest brother after whom I am named – Ian is Gaelic for John). John died in 1925 from pneumonia at the age of 27. In 1951 all that remained of his boat was the thick keel timber and the very rusty and disintegrating chain and anchor that secured the boat to the shore – it must have been pretty submerged at high tide.

To the east of this small landing beach are cliff like granite rocks. Attached to the lowest part of the rock face were affixed substantial wooden steps, not much more than a very strong ladder, and these were almost vertical. At the top of these steps was the commencement of the path to Eilean Shona House. The path to Eilean Shona House was a magnificent walk, sometimes along the water's edge and at others high above the shoreline providing outstanding views across to the mainland. The path passed through magnificent woodlands with specimen trees collected from around the world by Captain Swinburn. He purchased Eilean Shona in 1853 and built Eilean Shona House.

Captain Swinburn sold Eilean Shona House to another seafarer, a Spencer Thompson, in 1878 and he extended the house with the professional services of the Edinburgh architect R. S. Lorimer, the house was completed in 1891.

## Arean to the Shore House (now known as Double Cottage)

Following the death of my grandfather, my grandmother moved from Arean to the Shore House – a double residence, the ground floor and the upper floor, each a self-contained unit. Steps from the outside rear of the building reached the upper floor.

Double Cottage has magnificent views across the loch to Castle Tioram with the small wooded island of Riska on the eastern side. My grandmother occupied the ground floor; a very comfortable house with a sitting room, kitchen, bathroom and two bedrooms. The interior was completed with generous amounts of pine cladding – so typical of highland properties.



*Mary Ann Kennedy*



*Shore House (Double Cottage)*

The upper floor was occupied by Mrs MacLellan, her son Ian, daughter Annie and a young man Angus Kennedy, (no relation), for whom the deceased Mr MacLellan was originally guardian. The MacLellan's were a generous and hospitable family and always made us feel welcome. They were very good neighbours for my grandmother, especially during the long periods when she was alone. However, during the subsequent years my grandmother became almost immobile and she left Eilean Shona for Fort William to live with her youngest daughter Alexanderina (Ena). This was the end of Peter Kennedy's family association with Eilean Shona.



*My Father, Mother and Grandmother – early 1950's*

We stayed at the Shore House during our visits in the 1940's. In 1948 all types of food and provisions were as scarce in the Highlands as elsewhere in the United Kingdom and luxuries were non-existent. The traditional Highland methods of preserving food were well exercised. I recall mackerel fishing from a rowing boat on the loch with my Uncle Alex. We trawled baited lines with as many as twelve hooks attached to them. When we found a shoal, (they are easily seen in the waters of the loch), we pulled in as many as thirty mackerel at a time. The fish were gutted, cleaned and then salted down in large pots where they remained preserved for many months. Fortunately there was always sufficient fresh meat, lamb and mutton from the flocks on the hills complemented by venison when in season.

There was a shop on the mainland at Dorlin, but at that time the window was bare except for cardboard advertisements for goods not available. However, the shop did

have one commodity – ‘Nestle’s Condensed Milk’, which we purchased and regarded it as a very height of luxury.

Two or three times a year the Clyde Puffer came to the island with a cargo of coal, coke, oil and paraffin, which was unloaded at the pier and stored by the ‘Big House’ for distribution to the islanders.



## Kate Gillies Cottage (now Red Cottage)



*Kate Gillies Cottage*

By 1950 the number of families remaining on the isolated crofts has reduced, those that remained were long standing residents. On the hill above the Shore House on the lower slopes of Beinn a Bhaillidh was Kate Gillies Cottage. The path to the cottage climbed steeply through luscious undergrowth. In the autumn the bracken hid the path with canopies of leaves from stalks 6ft tall.

Kate Gillies lived alone in her two-roomed cottage. She was a tiny person but was strong and fit and she busied herself about the cottage and walked miles over the hills. Whenever we visited her she met us with much happiness and instantly provided generous hospitality with tea and scones – we usually had to wait whilst she baked the scones. To the right of her doorway she had a wooden bench seat from which there was a commanding and wonderful view over Loch Moidart, Castle Tioram and the hills around Dorlin. Kate, because of her advancing years, left Eilean Shona.





*The view from Kate Gillies Cottage*



## The Sawmill



*The Sawmill Cottage*

Below Kate Gillies Cottage on the shoreline, and situated on a small promontory, is the Sawmill, the house of Mary and Alastair MacDougal, (brother and sister). Alastair worked the sawmill and processed the wood and timber for the island. The sawmill was just off the wide track that hugged the shoreline to Barramore. About half way between the Sawmill Cottage and Barramore, on the shore side of the track, is an enormous rock, known as the Umbrella Rock, so called because it resembles a large shelter over the path. Its position is such that it gives the impression that it would take no effort to push it over.

The path, on nearing Barramore, turns off the shoreline and immediately ahead is Eilean Shona School. Over the years all the children on the island attended the school, including my mother and her brothers and sisters. The walk to school from all parts of the island was, in most cases, long, dangerous and tiresome, over the hills– most days being wet and dull.



*Eilean Shona School. The classroom was in the front of the building*

## Shepherds Cottage



*Great Uncle Angus's (A.T.) Cottage (Shepherds Cottage)*

A short distance from the school is the Shepherds Cottage, the home of my Great Uncle Angus Kennedy, (known throughout as 'A.T.'), and his wife Bessie. Angus had been a shepherd on Eilean Shona all his life; he was almost the age of 70 when I last met him. The small cottage, tucked between two low hills and on the shore on the north side, was typical of the Highlands with copious pine wainscoting. His boats were moored at a jetty just below the school. On a number of occasions he took my father and me fishing on the loch's North Channel. The North Channel is quite shallow and at low tide I recall sighting a sunken fishing vessel below the low tide level, clearly visible in the water with every detail to be seen but no obvious cause for its sinking.

'A.T.' was known within the family for his meanness with money, but he was a most generous man in every other way. He was a tall, thin man with white hair and had that wiry windswept appearance of Highland people. He also walked with a slight stoop, known in the family as the 'Kennedy Stoop' which was a characteristic of other family members.

I recall one minor incident when 'A.T.' came to the Shore House to row us across the loch to Castle Tioram for our return journey to England. On leaving us at Castle Tioram he gave my brother Stuart a half-crown coin – 'A.T.' giving away money was such a rare event that this became the topic of conversation with my Uncles and Aunts for many years.

'A.T.' died in 1976 aged 84 and his wife Bessie moved to Fort William and was not heard of again by the family.



The wide path ended just past the Shepherds Cottage and reverted to a track over the hill to Arean and Bailetonach, (the home of Mary Kennedy, (no relation), and her daughter Mary Maclean). Mary was an attractive young girl with a colourful highland complexion and bright auburn hair, but it was unfortunate that she and her mother lived a life of almost total seclusion.

The loch and seas around Eilean Shona can be treacherous with many incidents of boats and lives being lost. I recall hearing a conversation about a yacht, being taken from Eilean Shona to Gourock, being lost with all hands, at the entrance of the loch during a strong gale and heavy seas. A crew from the ship builders at Gourock manned the yacht.

On the West Side of the pier are the remains of another 'Shore House'. This property was destroyed, (I assume by fire), but it was at one time inhabited by my mother's cousin. This house was never talked about but as an old photograph shows it was a substantial house and more than likely was the predecessor to Eilean Shona House.



*An old photograph of the 'Shore House'*

Just above the pier are a series of low buildings, which were called the 'Battery Rooms', for the provision of generated electric power to Eilean Shona House. I remember those who entered these buildings always left their watches and timepieces outside on the window ledges, because of the effect magnetism may have had on them.

## Water Lily Ponds



*The Lily Pond and track towards Barramore*

I cannot fail to mention that the path from Eilean Shona House to Barramore passes alongside two small man-made lakes with dams. These water sources are known as the Lily Ponds, which, during the summer months, are totally filled with a profusion of pink and white water lilies.



## Eilean Shona Pier

Eilean Shona Pier with the white shelter, known as 'The Dairy' in my time, stands proudly upon it. The nearby Boat House is a wooden construction designed to beach and cover yachts and boats. In the roof apex is a large sail loft, which is large enough to accommodate and lay out yacht sails.

My grandfather was the boat keeper for the Howard de Waldens, he skippered their yachts and maintained the small croft. The most unusual vessel was the 'sheep boat' – an open stern flat bottomed boat designed specifically for transporting livestock, (as well as furniture and other large items), to and from the island. The boat berthed on the sandy beach at Castle Tioram, for loading and unloading.



*The Sheep Boat  
In the foreground is my Mother and wife, June*





*Eilean Shona House, Pier and Boat House*

## Journey to Kinloch Moidart to visit my Mother's cousins – 'The Smiths'

There were three routes from Eilean Shona to Kinloch Moidart:

- a) by boat
- b) by boat to Dorlin and then by road via Shiel Bridge and Mingarry
- c) by foot via the ford at low tide from Shona Beag.

Shona Beag is a small promontory attached to the east of Eilean Shona and is an estate in its own right, owned then by Miss Johnson of the Bovril manufacturing family. By coincidence when I was serving at the Royal Naval Air Station, Eglinton, Northern Ireland, in 1958, her nephew Philip Lawson-Johnson, a naval writer rating completing his National Service, worked with me in the Captain's office. Unfortunately, just prior to him arriving in Northern Ireland, his uncle, who lived in nearby Limavady, was murdered by the IRA.

The walk to Kinloch Moidart follows the path past the Sawmills into Shona Beag and across the ford at the narrowest point of the North Channel to a path on the mainland at Kylesmore. There was no road from Kinloch Moidart to Glen Uig and the coast during the times of my visits. The path from the ford takes a steep climb and at the top takes a sharp turn to the right towards Kinloch Moidart. The path finishes at the caves just passed the Post Office where the road begins. Gypsies for most of the year inhabited the caves but as with most caves in the West of Scotland they were alleged to have sheltered Bonnie Prince Charlie.

Walking now became easy, about half a mile passed the Post Office on the single-track road, was the house of 'The Smiths'. My grandfather's sister, 'Peggy Rhu', married Donald Smith of Kinloch Moidart. This marriage produced a family of five:

Alastair	(1904)
Donald	(1906)
Lexi	(1908)
Duncan	(1910)
Ian	(1912)

They all lived into the 1970's and lived together. The brothers were well known throughout the area of Fort William. One story that went around concerned their cheque signing. Bank accounts were rarely held by the older generation of Highlanders. The brothers held a combined account and to the mirth of businesses in Fort William, (mostly publicans), they signed their cheques: 'The Smith Brothers'.

By the time we had arrived in Kinloch Moidart the tide would have turned and covered the large stepping stones across the ford. The return journey for us was to be by rowing boat from Kinloch Moidart pier, pulled by one of the Smith boys – usually Alastair. It was not an easy row because on most occasions the tide was incoming and the water race between the islands in the loch was strong and fast, particularly between Riska and Eilean Shona.

## The Postman

Postie – Lachy McPhee was a regular and welcome visitor to Eilean Shona, he delivered mail, telegrams, supplies, newspapers and above all the gossip and news of people on Eilean Shona and the mainland around Mingarry. He called at most of the crofts on his rounds and found time to stop, talk and drink tea. He lived at Blain near to Mingarry on the mainland; his boat was permanently berthed on the sandy beach at Castle Tioram.

I recall an occasion at the Shore House during the time my mother's sister, Jessie, was staying there with her two boys Alastair and Peter. Peter was teased by Lachy and he put him inside his postbag and carried him off for a walk – the entire performance conducted in Gaelic. Young Peter could only speak Gaelic and it was not until he was five years old when the family returned to Glasgow that he had to learn his native language. This was not unusual as Jessie's husband, Peter MacEachen, came from South Uist and both of them were fluent Gaelic speakers. Jessie and her children remained at Eilean Shona for the duration of the latter war years up to 1945. Peter, her husband was in the army and served in France, as was my mother's brother, Angus, who was in the Royal Engineers Regiment. In 1944 they met up whilst serving in France, and subsequently they both returned safely from the war.



## Sunday Mass

To attend Sunday Mass was an ordeal and took up most of the day. Mass was usually at 11.00am in Mingarry Parish Church. The journey began with a rowing boat crossing to the sandy beach at Castle Tioram. From Castle Tioram commenced the long walk to Mingarry, up the steep road from the shore, skirting the Dorlin settlement, then along the road at the side of the River Shiel to Shiel Bridge. At Shiel Bridge the road takes a sharp turn left towards Mingarry. Mass lasted about an hour. The return journey took much longer because of visits and hospitality from relations and friends along the return route. It was often 3 or 4 o'clock in the afternoon before we arrived back on Eilean Shona.

The alternative venue for Mass was the small chapel in Glen Uig, an isolated settlement on the mainland coast, north of Eilean Shona. Apart from being rowed across the North Channel it was possible to be reached by using the ford off Shona Beag and follow the path to Kylesmore and turn left for Glen Uig, instead of right for Kinloch Moidart. The path to Glen Uig was narrow and winding and steeply descends to sea level; the chapel is just above the shoreline, to the left of the track to Smirisary.

The people in Kinloch Moidart could attend Mass in the chapel in Glen Uig as an alternative to Mingarry, but Glen Uig could only be reached by the path over the hills from the Post Office – an 8 mile journey. There was no road at that time from Kinloch Moidart to Glen Uig; it ended at the Post Office. Today there is a magnificent road that goes to Glen Uig and the new ferry piers for boats to Rhum and Eigg, and then continues northwards along the picturesque coast towards Lochailort and Mallaig.

The Glen Uig chapel's isolation was described in a feature article published in the, 'Times of Malta', on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1957, as follows:

# THE CHURCH WITHOUT A ROAD TO IT

By MACKENZIE STEWART

It is astonishing to think that there is a Catholic church on the mainland of Scotland that is inaccessible by road: that, though Mass is said there every Sunday, you must walk eight miles if you want to hear it.

I should not have known about this, had we not gone to Ardnamurchan for our family holiday this year.

There is only one road leading into this peninsula, and it is a tortuous route indeed; but it is possible to take a short cut over Corran Ferry which saves you forty-two miles.

It is a lovely road westwards all the way from the ferry to Ardnamurchan Point, which is as far West as you can go on the mainland of Great Britain.

Ardnamurchan is a Protestant area and we stayed, in fact, with Wee Frees; but at the eastern end of Ardnamurchan (which is in Argyllshire) you are divided only by the River Shiel from Moidart in Inverness-shire — and Moidart has always been Catholic.

The Catholics and the Protestants get on well in these parts and each attends the other's dances and sales of work.

## Beautiful Scenery

You do not have to go far into Moidart before you come to the parish church at Mingarry. It is beautifully situated amidst fir trees and you approach it by walking up a short, steeply winding path from the road.

Mingarry church is larger than you might have expected but there is a good congregation and the unaccompanied singing of the choir — whether in Latin, English or Gaelic — is of a high order.

One Sunday the priest was to be away, so I asked where the next church was. I was told it was at Glenuig, a village on the North coast of Moidart, and that the only way to reach it was to walk from Kinlochmoidart. Glenuig gets all its supplies by boat: the footpath in the opposite direction, from Kinlochallort, is eight miles long instead of four. Neither route is possible even for a cyclist.

It was a lovely morning on the Sunday and so I decided to make the walk. Mary, my eldest girl — she is eleven — said she would come, too, and of course we had to take Dan, the sheep dog: we could not let it miss such a wonder-

ful walk, even if we were uncertain what we would do with it when we reached Glenuig.

We left the car at the pier at Kinlochmoidart and set off on our walk at half past nine. We took a bar of chocolate apiece, but it was too hot to take coats or even jackets. This would be the first time that I had been to Mass in my shirt sleeves.

## The Cairns

I had been told that it was a beautiful walk, but I was not prepared for what we found. It is entrancing, like a scene from fairyland.

For the first two miles the stony path winds up and down and in and out through a forest that is chiefly old oak trees; down below you, on your left, you keep catching glimpses of Loch Moidart: the tide was in that morning and the loch was brilliant in the sunshine, yet it was cool amongst the great trees.

The path is often steep, and at one place it goes up in hairpin bends; this is the 'Devil's Staircase' of the Scottish Six Days Motor Cycle Trials.

We met nobody and we passed but one house all the way to Glenuig — unless you count the tramp's cave near the pier: the tramp was not at home that day, and his two straw-covered rooms had a forlorn air.

Little streams rush down the hillside into the loch. We would stop now and then and, cupping our hands, drink the clear, cool water.

After a couple of miles the path leaves the forest and edges away from the loch to enter a green glade which slowly becomes more steep. This leads you up to the Bealach Carach — the winding pass — which is the watershed.

There are many little stone cairns by the side of the path here; Mary asked me why this was, but I could only suppose that they were built by children.

Arrived at the top of the Bealach, you see the Sound of Arisaig before you, but you do not immediately see Glenuig in its hollow. The descent is by a narrow path through trees, but these are little trees, not the giants of Loch Moidart-side.

It was already eleven o'clock — by the time we came to the first houses of Glenuig. We quickened our steps: it was easier now, going downhill.

Glenuig is a charming little place: a dozen or so

houses clustered round a bay; a pier; a school; a church — that is all, but it is a peaceful spot and it has a fertile look about it. There is a road within the village, and it seemed odd that it did not lead to the outside world.

At last, we were at the church. It is a little building on a hilltop at the far side of the village. Mass had begun, so we tied Dan to a fence and went in. Dan was not used to this treatment and set up a pitiful wailing. One or other of us had to keep popping out to try to pacify him.

After Mass was over, we sat on the grass looking out over the sea to the majestic range of the Coolins in Skye. We realized now that we should have brought more than chocolate with us. It would be about four o'clock before we were home and we were hungry already. So, choosing a cottage at random, I enquired for the good lady and asked her if she could spare a glass of milk for Mary.

"Certainly", she said: "come in: would you care for a cup of tea, because I've just made some?"

By good fortune we had come, it turned out, to the house where tea is always brewed for travellers from Kinlochmoidart: we were not the only ones who were being refreshed. The priest himself was there, too. I said to him that I was afraid Dan had disturbed the parishioners.

"No, indeed", said he, "but you should have brought him inside."

"Ach!", said another tea-drinker, "I think we would have had a worse disturbance then: the dog that is there every week would not have been pleased at all to have seen a rival in the church."

## Homeward Journey

We were given quite a little meal. It was very welcome, and the Celtic kindness with which it was proffered was truly genuine.

We were accompanied by other walkers for part of the homeward journey. As we passed the cairns, I asked a shepherd if he knew their history.

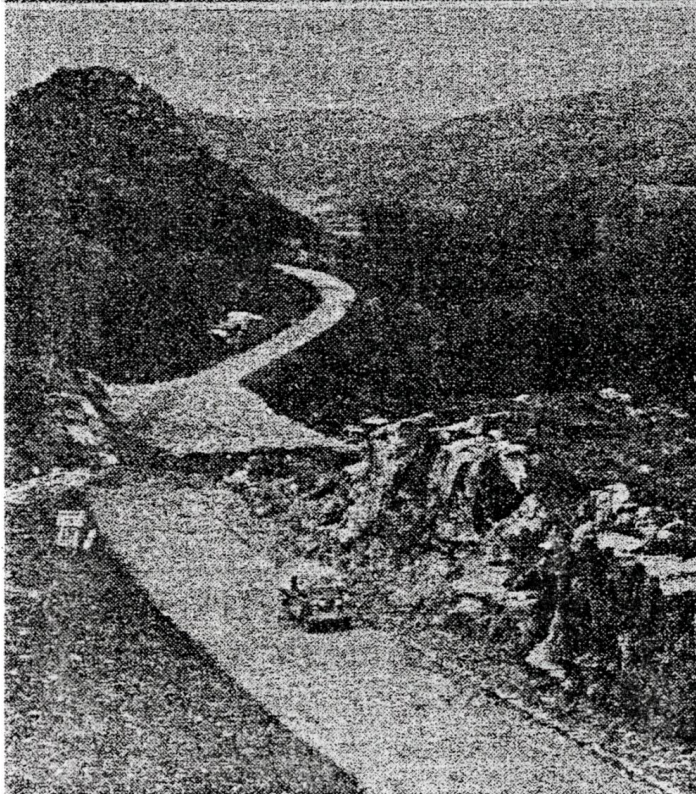
"Yes", he answered: "in the old days everyone that died in Glenuig was carried to the Burial Ground on the Green Isle in Loch Shiel: the people would rest here and add a stone to one of the cairns. Each family had its own cairn."

It was indeed past four o'clock when we reached home, and too late for dinner: so we had bacon and two eggs apiece. This provided a pleasant ending to a unique experience.

If you are ever in those parts yourself, take the path to Glenuig and see the church without a road to it: I am sure there is no finer walk in all Scotland.



Work has started on connecting Glenug with the rest of Scotland. Above: Drillers prepare to blast away the rock, and (below) an unsurfaced stretch of the 12-mile road between Kinlochmoidart and Glenug.



## Lone hamlet to get its first road

DAILY TELEGRAPH REPORTER

**G**LENUIG, one of Scotland's loneliest hamlets, is slowly being connected by road to the outside world and the 40 inhabitants are viewing the end of their seclusion with mixed feelings.

For centuries the villagers have hankered for closer contact with the rest of Scotland but now they feel that although the road may revitalise the tiny crofting area which has suffered severely from the drain of its young folk and will remove some of the hardships of winter isolation, it will introduce a disturbing influence into the calm of their lives.

The hamlet, which nestles on the south bank of the sea Loch Ailort, in the Moidart Peninsula, has never had a road. Sole communication has been a single line telephone and an irregular ferry-boat service up the loch to the nearest rail halt at Loch Ailort.

### Creeping peat bogs

Now, backed by a Government authorisation of £800,000 more than 100 engineers and drillers are driving a 12-mile road through a terrain of crags, precipices, rushing mountain streams, and, worst of all, creeping peat bogs.

That this operation follows almost exactly the old military path taken by Prince Charles Edward when his standard was raised at Glenfinnan in 1745, is a romantic fact which has little appeal for the road builders.

Most of the credit for the new road is attributable to two members of the present community—Mr. Sandy Gallies, 86, a retired crofter, who 50 years ago presented a petition signed by all the 100 villagers, and Major Richard Clegg, a retired South African Army officer, now the Laird of Glenug, who has pressed vigorously for action in recent years.

### Winter emergencies

The Laird's main argument for a road has been that it will alleviate the fears of many crofters of being completely cut off from food supplies and medical services in winter emergencies.

Under normal conditions it takes the nearest doctor almost a day to make the journey, and that only if the telephone is working, which is not always the case.

Major Clegg points out that the road will also bring economic benefits. At present, for example, all provisions are taken in by boat, and a loaf costing about 1s. in the nearest town of Fort William costs more than 2s. by the time it reaches the crofter's table in Glenug.



## Dorlin House

Immediately behind Castle Tioram on the mainland at the foot of Ben Mhinn (600ft) stood Dorlin House, a large highland lodge mainly constructed of wood. During my visits to Eilean Shona the house was empty and showed signs of rapid deterioration. Interestingly to me the building was taken over by the Royal Navy in 1942 and was formally commissioned as a Royal Naval Establishment and named, HMS DORLIN, on 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1942. This naval unit was primarily a special training establishment of the Combined Operations Command and provided advanced training for RN and RM personnel in the operation and maintenance of landing craft.

The Royal Navy was the last occupant of the property; the building was reduced to care and maintenance in April 1944, and closed down on 28<sup>th</sup> November 1944.

The subsequent long period of unoccupancy caused the building to become unsafe and a hazard to visitors who had free and unrestricted access to it. The building was destroyed by burning and all that remained when I last visited were the foundations. There are also two garages in the grounds of the house with a flat above them. By coincidence I met the lady who lived in the flat when I was staying at the Inveroran Hotel at Bridge of Orchy in 1968. She was a guest in the hotel on holiday from Loch Moidart!



*Dorlin House was sited to the left of the buildings.  
Photograph taken from Castle Tioram. The sandy beach is covered at high tide*



NAVAL HISTORICAL BRANCH

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Empress State Building London SW6 1TR

Telephone 01-385 1244 ext 3237

Commander I K Brooks RN  
Sec/FOSNI  
HMS COCHRANE  
Rosyth  
Fife

Your reference

Our reference

D/NHB/3/3/175

Date

8 February 1980

Dear Commander Brooks

As I rather expected, we have very little information in this Branch on HMS DORLIN, and the following is all that I am able to provide:-

HMS DORLIN, Dorlin House, Acharacle, Argyllshire, was commissioned on 23 March 1942 as a Special Training Establishment, Combined Operations Command. It was administered by the Commodore, HMS LOUISBURG, Rosneath, (SNO Combined Ops North) and provided advanced training for RN ratings in the operation and maintenance of landing craft, with Special Service troops. The establishment was reduced to Care and Maintenance on 6 April 1944 and closed down on 28 November 1944.

A number of books about Combined Ops have been published since the war which may possibly contain references to HMS DORLIN, eg "The Watery Maze" by Bernard Ferguson, "Amphibious Operations" by Arch Whitehouse. I have just skimmed through a handy copy of "The War of the Landing Craft" by Lund and Ludlam, and although Inverary and Inverailort are mentioned, HMS DORLIN is unfortunately not. Some records may have been preserved at the Public Record Office but I will not make a search for these unless I hear further from you.

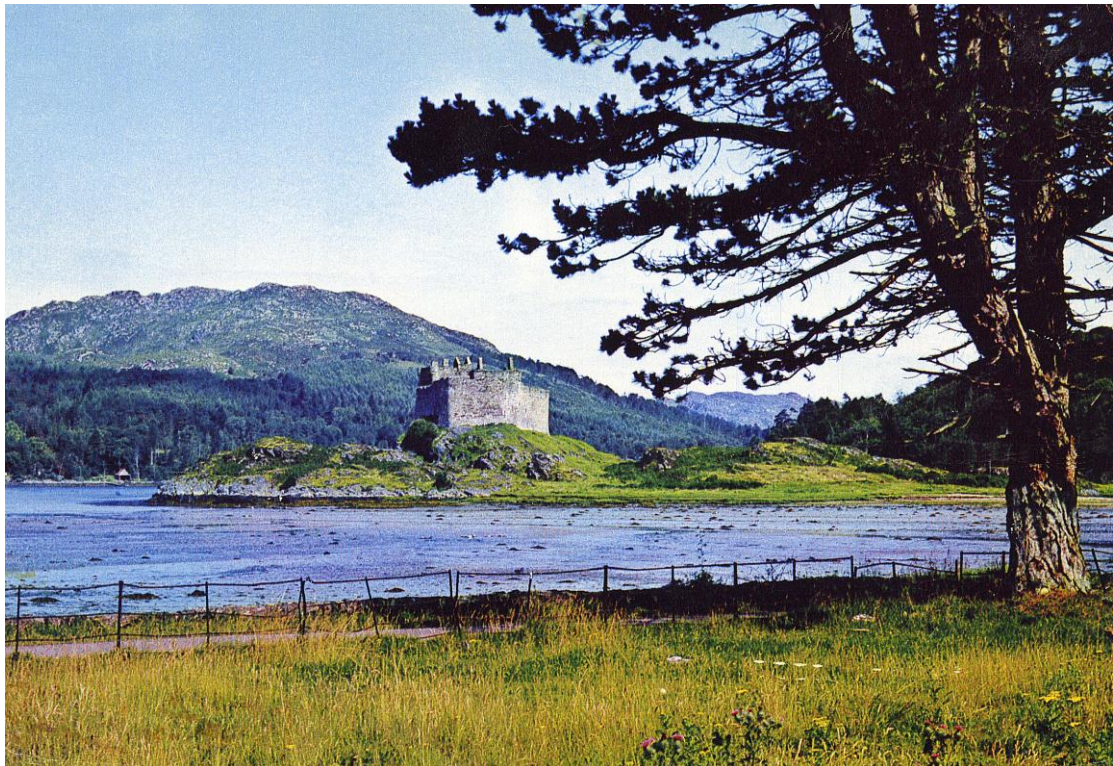
Yours sincerely

(Miss) M W THIRKETTE

VM/96



## Castle Tioram



*Castle Tioram*

Castle Tioram, (pronounced Chiarm), was built in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century on a rocky island on the southern side of Loch Moidart. It is accessible on foot at low tide and its approach by sea is through a labyrinth of hidden underwater rocks.

During the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries the Lord of the Isles, (a title held by Prince Charles), held sway over Western Scotland and the population became very loyal supporters of the Jacobite cause. There are numerous stories about Castle Tioram, one of my favourites is, that in one siege the Campbells, (the traditional enemies of the MacDonalds of Clanranald), gave up their siege and left. To the delight of the Castle's inhabitants, they went to the mainland to celebrate. However, the Campbells returned under cover of darkness and put the few remaining in the Castle to the sword, but a furious counter-attach by the Clanranalds saw the Campbells totally annihilated.

The story continues that the Castle remained in Clanranalds hands until 1715 when it was set on fire and destroyed by the chieftain, Allan of Clanranald, to prevent it falling into English hands.

When I last visited Castle Tioram the Castle was in a state of disrepair, but there were marked directions on the walls to indicate hidden passageways from the dungeons, and upwards around the inside walls at floor levels, up to the turrets at the top. On the walls of the turret my father carved his initials 'H.B.' – amongst many other inscriptions carved over hundreds of years.

Folklore and clan history abounds, but recent research investigations made in preparation for the sale of the Castle in 1997, by the Californian branch of the clan, the MacDonald-Wisemans, who purchased the castle after World War II, has revealed that in the 1680's the Castle was a comfortable dwelling. It was abandoned long before the Jacobite uprising and, having fallen into ruins, was occupied as a Hanoverian out post.

There will no doubt always be controversy, but sadly the days of free access to the Castle and its islands are probably over. I am so grateful for having known Castle Tioram at a time when access was free and uninhabited and to have known it as a special monument to the Clanranalds history.





## The Green Isle



*The Green Isle from Dalelia*

It is almost 60 years since I became acquainted with the Green Isle. At the time we were on our way to visit my grandmother on Eilean Shona, it was pointed out to me from the Loch Shiel boat, the 'M.V.Clanranald', on its way from Glenfinnan to Acharacle. It was not until 1948 when a family bereavement sharply focussed my interest on this tiny island – a gem of antiquity. It is believed that the Green Isle, (Eilean Fhianian), has been used as a burial ground for more than a thousand years. One account of its history believes that it takes its name from an early Celtic saint named Finan – of which there have been a number of that name canonised by the Roman Catholic Church. One Finan especially associated with the island was a leper; legend has it that he came from Donegal in Ireland where he infected himself with leprosy from a child who came to him to be cured. After the church consecrated him he wished to visit Rome but, because of leprosy, Columba forbade him to do so. He then crossed from Ireland to Moidart and he first set sight of the island that now bears his name from a point between Ockle and Gortferne on the north side of the Loch.

Another account subscribes to the theory that the name is a compilation, 'EDNAN', Gaelic for ADAMAN, (a noted Abbot of Iona and biographer of St Columba). It is believed that Ednan, during his journey across Ireland was persuaded by his mother to free the women of Ireland from taking part in warfare and fighting in battle. Until this time the women of Ireland were required to do Military Service and his mother



desired that he free women, 'from fighting, from hosting, from wounding, from slaying'. This it is believed was the beginning of the emancipation for the deliverance of women from warfare.

Whatever its origins it is a burial ground of great age. There is little evidence to base any firm assessment. There are no ancient monuments and the roofless church offers little help.

In more recent times the Rev. Charles MacDonald – a much respected parish priest and historian of Moidart – attributes the building of the church to the Chief of Clanranald, (Allan MacRuaridh).



*The Alter and Bronze Bell*

The church is an unimpressive building of plain walls and flagstone floor. Its centrepiece is the stone altar at the eastern end. Placed upon it is one of the four remaining early Celtic bronze bells in Scotland. The bell bears no inscription. Up to 120 years ago the bell was carried sun wise around the island at the head of a funeral procession. The tongue of the bell is made of iron and is not the original. During the Jacobite troubles the bell was stolen by soldiers travelling from Moidart to Fort William.



*The Bell and Allan Cross*

The sexton and custodian of the island at that time was Niall Moran Eilean, (Big Neil of the Island). When he found that the bell had been removed, he set out in pursuit and caught up with them at Glenfinnan where upon he captured the thief and recovered the bell. The tongue of the bell was missing and this was replaced by the iron one made by one of the MacDonald's of Kinlochmoidart.





*The Carved Skeleton*

On the north side of the island there are a number of locally quarried stones in the shape of a crucifix, probably quarried stone from above Mingarry. To the south of the church ruins is the figure of a skeleton carved in stone, the grave of Rev. Alexander MacDonald. There are no records to indicate the final resting-place of most of those buried there. Stories abound as to how corpses were brought to the island, some graves were desecrated and some bones laid for many years on the ground under the altar slab.

The burial ground did not escape the 'body lifters', called the Resurrectionists, (made famous by the activities of Burke and Hare). In those days the graveyards had to be watched at night and guarding of the graves rested in members of the funeral party of the last person buried.

During my grandparents time and earlier, the island was kept in a reasonable state by the Howards of Glossop, but when I last visited in the 1950's the island was neglected and overgrown. Brambles and bushes hid the gravestones and the ruin of the church stood starkly over the encroaching vegetation.



*Old Crosses carved from rock mined above Minmgarry*







*The Ruined church*



*Mass is said occasionally on the island*