

# COIGACH HERITAGE

Newsletter May 2019

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

## HERITAGE TEA

Our famous Heritage Tea is fast approaching! Come along to the Coigach Community Hall on 1<sup>st</sup> June from 2.30 – 4.30 and enjoy the best of Coigach's legendary baking and delicious sandwiches, all served on vintage china. Baking and raffle donations most welcome! There will be displays about our fishing history, about the history of Tanera, and a preview of the 'Coigach: who we are' collection of photographs.

## FIND US ONLINE!

Coigach Heritage is now online at [www.coigach.com](http://www.coigach.com). Click on 'Community', then 'Local History'. Find photos and interesting articles about Coigach's past on here: crofting, fishing, the land, the sea, culture and community and early history. Comments and suggestions are always welcome and more material will be added in the coming months. We also have a new Facebook page: search for 'Coigach Heritage' - [www.facebook.com/coigachheritage](https://www.facebook.com/coigachheritage) - a forum for sharing photographs and memories.

## ARCHIVE PROJECT

The archive, organised by Anne Campbell, is now saved onto hard drives and original documents are stored in acid-free material in the Coigach Heritage cupboard in the Community Room at the hall. Hard copies of images and documents are in the filing cabinet. We're in the process of digitising the archive, a huge job which will make our amazing collection of photos and documents accessible to everyone interested.



## NEW CALENDAR

The 2020 calendar will be on sale at the end of June: a lovely present and something to treasure. We are grateful to everyone who helps seek out interesting photos and stories; without your help there would be no calendars!



## CCDC SMALL GRANT AWARDED

We are delighted that, thanks to Coigach Community Development Company funding, Ann Marie Firth-Bernard has been recruited to help with administration and publicity. Ann Marie is also looking after the Facebook page and is the first point of contact for emails to [coigach.heritage@gmail.com](mailto:coigach.heritage@gmail.com).

## UPCOMING PROJECTS

There is no shortage of great ideas for conserving, promoting and researching Coigach's rich history. Our big ambition is to create a permanent heritage and visitor centre, possibly based around a replica hut circle. We are just starting this conversation and there will be opportunities for everyone to contribute ideas.

Arrangements are being made to install the plaque commemorating the 19<sup>th</sup> century open air preaching place near the War Memorial.

A memorial sculpture to the Crofters' Resistance of the 1850s is a priority: this is a very important piece of local Clearances history. It is early days yet and no decisions have been made as to where this might be sited. Some people call these events the 'Coigach Riots'; others feel strongly that this was the derogatory term used by the landlord and the bailiffs to discredit what was a carefully organised and successful movement to resist evictions. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Highlands it was a rare victory for the people over a landlord.

Other suggestions from members include a heritage trail, a publication on the story of Coigach, regular lectures and events, and documentation of important community arts and crafts (such as the quilt).

We are keen to hear views on all these plans and ideas, so please speak to one of the committee, or email us. Coigach's heritage belongs to us all.



## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

If you're not already a member, please do sign up. It costs only £10 a year. Join at the Heritage Tea, and there will also be membership forms at the Post Office. Or email us at [coigach.heritage@gmail.com](mailto:coigach.heritage@gmail.com). Fees are payable by cash, cheque (made payable to 'Coigach Heritage'), or by direct banking: sort code 83-28-01, account number 00153987, giving your surname as a payment reference. If you'd like to, please set up a yearly standing order online. Thank you!

## STORIES FROM THE PAST

We asked two local residents, Dorothy Miller and Bill Drake, to write down some of their memories of Coigach. Here are their stories, firstly Bill's.

### *A War-time Holiday in Coigach*

*The story of my first trip to Achiltibuie in the early 1940s really starts in September 1916 when my grandfather, Bernard Drake, decided that he must have a holiday from war work. Hearing of good fishing from a friend, he booked into the Achiltibuie Hotel with his wife and his son (my father). As Achiltibuie was in a military area, a form of police passport was required, the reason for the visit given as 'sport' being quite acceptable. Hearing that some stalking could be obtained by the day, he wired home for his rifle, which was sent up from Sussex by train, presumably arriving on the mail bus the day after it was dispatched. There must have been ammunition packed with it. What uncomplicated days! They had a great time catching large brown trout and sea fishing from the hotel launch. The holiday was obviously a memorable success because in 1942 or 3 my father, in similar circumstances, found that he needed a break and recalled his 1916 holiday.*

*Finding the hotel was open, he booked for the family for, I suppose, a 4 week holiday. We – my parents and my brother and sister – travelled by train to Inverness, then to Garve, and then on Miss Mackenzie's bus to Ullapool, driven by John Robertson who had a guest house. Finally we caught the mail bus to the Achiltibuie Hotel where we were greeted by Mr and Mrs George Ross and sons John and Sandy. We had such a wonderful, relaxed time and enjoyed ourselves so much that we became 'regulars' and I kept up with regular visits. We bought our house from Dodo's sister, Joanna, in 1959 and moved in permanently in 1988.*

*I have great memories of the early days: my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday party in the school, courtesy of Miss Campbell. George Ross had been saving bottles of beer for weeks, it being very scarce in 1949, and Kenny Stewart played the pipes... Lamb sales in Badentarbet fank followed by Gaelic songs in the*

*crammed hotel bar - closing time, I think, 9.30... Having to be a traveller to get a drink on Sunday...*

*Only 2 or 3 cars in the village... William Sinclair's taxi which was an old American Essex car, and the policeman had a small car and would drive us to fish on Raa or Lurgainn... The steamer on a monthly visit would bring Beattie's bread from Glasgow and sometimes a barrel of beer for the hotel, but quite often "there's no beer" was the case... Rowing over to Tanera with Big George to see if Jimmy Tanera would take us all out in the islands sea fishing. He had to keep his foot on the gear lever to make it stay in gear... A spark plug drying on top of the engine... And when we landed on an island for a picnic he chipped the coke out of the exhaust with a screwdriver.*

*So much comes back: the day's catch from the lochs laid out for approval in the hall of the hotel and served up for breakfast the following day... The surprising number of fatal accidents in the sheep population in times of severe rationing... The noise and smell of Tilley lamps... I could go on, but it is, I think, more for our next issue.*

And here is Dorothy's:

### ***The Guest House***

*Until the early 1950s the Summer Isles Hotel, apart from the Youth Hostel, was virtually the only place offering accommodation for visitors to Coigach. But then Angus and Edna Macleod arrived on the scene!*

*Angus had been brought up in the family home in Badenscallie. He had gone to school in Achiltibuie – like many of his contemporaries, speaking only Gaelic when he began but eventually leaving with pretty well perfect English and able to produce, for example, a correctly spelt and punctuated letter (in elegant handwriting) in what had been the foreign language. He spent some years helping on the family croft and taking on various jobs like working with the road gang and then, as so many young local men did, went south to join the police – in his case the Lancashire Constabulary. It was while he was on the beat in Preston that he met Edna Pattinson, a lively and attractive lass from a large Preston family. They married. (Angus once confided in me that as they came out of the church after the wedding he overheard an onlooker exclaim: "What a handsome couple!") Then they settled down to life in Preston where they remained until Angus had served his full term with the police. They had two sons but Alastair, the older boy, died at a young age which must have been heartbreaking and which left a long lasting shadow on their lives. Perhaps they felt the need for a break from Preston. Angus certainly wanted to return to the Highlands and Edna agreed to the move but with the stipulation: only if she could open a guest house.*



*Angus accepted this proposition and they came north to look for suitable premises. They had considered one or two places in Ross-shire but while they were visiting in Coigach found that the old croft house at Achnacarinan was for sale. It had stood empty for some time and must have been in a rather run down condition but they could see the possibilities and bought it.*

*A lot of work was needed to transform a fairly basic croft house into a building suitable for guests but it all went ahead. The roof had to be raised to make more roomy bedrooms. Angus always remembered how the local mason, Willie 'Huisdean' Macleod, at one point held up the roof single handed while this job was in progress! New windows were installed, a new kitchen built on, a proper bathroom plumbed in, and of course, a lot of general smartening up and redecorating (much of which Edna probably took a hand in herself). Eventually it was all finished and they were in business.*

*The house now had three double bedrooms and a sitting room for the guests. During the 'season' Angus and Edna slept in the nearby byre and just used the kitchen for themselves during the day. They had a well defined working system. Angus's first task in the morning was to get the kitchen Raeburn going, Edna's to make fresh rolls for the guests' breakfast and to prepare any packed lunches required. From then on it must have been a busy day for both. There were hens and a cow to see to - goats too for some years until they proved a bit too much work and finally disgraced themselves, I am told, by eating Angus's pants off the washing line. The long-neglected ground around the house was turned into a productive garden with fruit trees and every variety of soft fruit and Angus had a large vegetable garden as well as a big potato patch.*

*Edna was a confident and resourceful cook. She told me once that she didn't have a recipe book in the house, so the huge range of dishes she produced must have owed their success to memory, instinct and imagination! She would happily deal with all the game and fish brought in, turn her hand to any kind of baking, have mammoth sessions of jam making when the soft fruit was ready and prepare enough marmalade for the year when the Seville oranges arrived. Her meals were probably a major attraction to the guests!*

*I don't know how the Guest House was advertised but I don't think it ever lacked custom. Many guests continued to come year after year. The Drakes, from Sussex, for example, booked the whole house for four or five weeks over a period of years to accommodate a party of friends who came for the*

*shooting and fishing - which must have been a real bonus. On these occasions Angus's brother Willie would come along from Badenscallie to help and advise with the activities on the hill. And even when Angus and Edna had more or less retired they still welcomed a few 'old faithfuls' back every summer. Some of them had almost become part of the family – like Dr Norah Lumm who stood as godmother to their youngest grandchild!*

*As well as running the Guest House, both Angus and Edna took an active part in the community. Angus served for various spells as District Councillor, J.P., and Church Elder. Edna enjoyed any social events and was chiefly responsible for starting weekly whist drives in the old village hall which were a popular winter entertainment. They liked an evening out, though never neglecting the needs of the Guest House. One winter's night, coming back from a dinner dance in Ullapool, they spotted a herd of deer not far from home. Angus lost no time in collecting his rifle from the house, shot one, and he and Edna traipsed across the moor in their evening clothes (in Edna's case long dress and high heels) to do the gralloching and get the new supply of venison into the freezer.*

*A further responsibility undertaken was to act as caretakers for Acheninver Lodge. This was a new holiday house built for Lord Linlithgow so that he could enjoy fishing on Loch Osaig which he had bought when the Cromartie estate here was sold in the 50s. Angus and Edna kept an eye both on the house and the boat and boathouse on Osaig and were at hand to deal with queries from visitors to the Lodge.*

*Despite so many activities they always seemed to welcome folk dropping in and enjoyed having friends and neighbours to meals. Then there were visits from grandchildren. Their son Roddy had come north and joined the Northern Constabulary. He was stationed for some years on Lewis and later in Dingwall. He was married to Eileen, from Easter Ross and they had three children: Fiona, Roy and Rona, all of whom came to stay from time to time, sometimes for quite long periods. The two older grandchildren even attended school here for a term or two while their mother was in hospital. There were still some new ventures, however, like buying a couple of caravans to let to holiday makers.*

*Eventually, after what must have been at least three decades of what would seem to most folk an extraordinarily busy 'retirement' Angus and Edna decided to leave Achnacarinan. Fiona's husband was to build a new house for them on the croft. Edna's plan was for Roddy and Eileen to take over the old house and to continue running it as a guest house. The new house took a while to build but they finally moved in, much to Edna's delight. But, very understandably, Roddy and Eileen were not keen to move to Achnacarinan. By then they were settled in Dingwall with their own interests and activities. Roddy had retired but, a keen musician, he enjoyed playing with a local band. Eileen, though a more than competent cook and housewife, knew from summer visits what a daunting prospect would face them: the old house would need a huge amount of work to bring it up to the standard tourists were beginning to look for. And fashions were changing. In the 50s the Drakes had come all the way from Sussex by a series of rail and bus journeys and content to stay put for their sporting*

*activities, just occasionally hiring a local driver if needed. Now most people were touring by car, maybe just stopping one or two nights before moving on. There was a popular camping site at Achnahaird and more and more houses were becoming available for holiday lets.*

*Sadly, Edna died after only one or two years of enjoying the new house. Angus lived on there by himself and the old house stood empty.*

*1993 is still remembered by some of us as the year of eleven funerals and one of those was for Angus. But there are again Macleods at Achnacarinan: Angus and Edna's grandson Roy inherited the croft and now lives in Achnacarinan with his wife Rose and, with daughters and grandchildren often around, it is a family home again even if its days as the 'Guest House' are only a memory!*



**Back: Willie "Taylor" MacLeod (Angus's brother), Angus,  
Front : Edna, ? Unknown fair-haired lady (do you recognise her?), and Mrs Drake (Bill's mother).  
Thanks to Bill for the photograph.**

### **Did you know..?**

#### **First Gaelic school at Badentarbet**

According to the transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness, one of the first 2 Gaelic schools in Scotland was established at Badentarbet around 1812. At that time schoolteachers were housed in the homes of local people. One Polbain teacher was lodged in the Old Dornie farm and the only cutlery in the area belonged to Will Maclean's great grandmother. When the teacher moved, the cutlery went with him... Much of the schooling took the form of night classes. Will's grandfather paid the teacher one dozen eggs for his fees.

## From Coigach to Waterloo

It appears that when Admiral Nelson fell, mortally wounded at Trafalgar, he collapsed into the arms of a sailor (probably press-ganged) from Coigach. It was said that the sailor in question was a MacLennan from Badenscallie. We heard this fascinating story from someone whose grandfather may have known the sailor personally.

And finally, a recipe from the fantastic Coigach Cook Book...

129

### Iba's Cloutie Dumpling

2½ lbs. s.r.flour  
2 lbs.or more dried fruit  
1 lb. Atoxa suet  
1 lb. fine brown sugar  
1 tsp. baking soda  
2 tsp. mixed spice or cinnamon  
pinch salt  
3 eggs, or more or less  
2 large dstsp. treacle  
1 large dstsp. syrup  
milk or cold tea



Put all the dry ingredients in a bowl. Mix treacle, syrup and eggs, add to bowl and mix well. Now add as much milk or tea as will form a dropping consistency - but not too soft. Have a large pan of boiling water ready with a plate in the bottom of the pan to prevent sticking. Rinse out a square cloth in hot water, spread it out on the table, sprinkle flour over it and rub in evenly with your hand. Drop the mixture on the cloth and tie well. Put into boiling water and leave it boiling for 4 hrs. at least adding more boiling water when necessary. When you've removed the pudding cloth and you happen to have a hot oven to hand, you can pop the dumpling into the oven for 10 mins. to dry it off. It's not necessary though, and lots of people prefer the sticky outside. Very good next day fried in butter.

Iba Ross

### Coigach Heritage Office Bearers and Committee

Bill Drake (Chair), Mairi Thornton (Secretary), Una Macgregor (Treasurer and Membership Secretary), Abigail Anne Campbell (Archivist), Cathy Macneilage, Julia Campbell, Veronica Vossen-Wood, David Green

