



Lorn Archaeological & Historical Society
Comunn Eachdraidh Lathurna FOUNDED 1963

Autumn Newsletter 2012

Letter from the outgoing Chairman

Dear fellow-members,

At last year's A.G.M. I advised you that, because of my continuing responsibilities at St John's Cathedral, I could only manage to fulfil part of the responsibilities that might be expected of a chairman. I reckoned that I could chair meetings and put up posters, but not act as the public face of the Society. On that occasion you were kind enough to show your confidence by reappointing me even to that limited rôle.

However, although the arrival of a new Provost at St John's means a reduction in my church duties, family commitments have now increased to the point where I must decline to remain in the Chairman's post any longer. I am sorry that I shall not be able to serve the Society further in this way, but I have enjoyed the last two or three years, and am very grateful for the opportunity and privilege you have given me of learning more about the past life of our area than other members of the Society might manage.

If I look back on the past year's evening meetings, I am particularly struck by the fact that several of our speakers brought new and exciting styles of delivery to our talks. Sometimes that was their own way of doing things; sometimes it was landed on them by *force majeure*, such as difficulties with the projection equipment. It would be invidious to mention names, but a number of times a member of the audience came up to me and expressed particular appreciation of our guest because he/she had spoken in a way that got across to people without specialised historical or archaeological knowledge.

I do hope that we will keep on benefiting from that kind of skill, so that the Society may help to pass on the vast reserve of knowledge that there is about Lorn and its surroundings to a wider circle, and I wish whoever takes over the chair, and the rest of the committee, well in that demanding task.

With all best wishes,

Ian Walter

Secretary's Report

This has been a busy year with a series of extremely interesting lectures. These have been so successful that we have needed to find larger premises. Professor David Purdie's superb lecture on 'The Scottish Enlightenment' was slightly marred by the echoey acoustics of the large hall at Glencruitten Church Centre; as a result, we will be holding this year's lecture series in **St Columba's Church hall on Corran Esplanade**. This is larger than the undercroft at Glencruitten and has good acoustics and a kitchen. The hall is behind St Columba's church, on the Esplanade with parking behind the adjacent scout hut. If anyone is unsure about the location, please contact Joan Kemp, email: lahsoc@gmail.com, tel: 01631 566963



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The lecture series for next year is almost complete and we have some excellent speakers lined up.

Treasurer's Report

Accounts summary 31 August 2012.

The LAHS current account has a balance of £724.57
Savings account has £1902.34

Over the year there was income of £966.35
However expenses totalled £1182.72
The result is a loss of £216.37 over the year.

Income from subscriptions was £420, non-members fees & donations of £126.50, and magazine sales of £419.85.

The expenses are from room hire & meeting expenses (£193.78), Third party insurance (£183.10), subs expenses, newsletter, postage, etc (£93), speaker gifts and expenses (£235.76) and magazine printing & expenses (£477.08).

Despite the small decline in the overall bank balance the Society remains financially secure.

T.N. Polley. Treasurer.

Visit to Glen Lonan and the deserted settlement of Barr Glas, 12th May 2012

An enthusiastic group of members joined John Macfarlane for a visit to Glen Lonan in May. We drove to several different sites of historical and archaeological interest, some of which are described below. The trip finished at Jeremy & Carol Church's delightful home in the glen - and on a chilly day, their warm hospitality was particularly welcome.

Dùn t-Samhnachan

This is shown as Dun Tashebracken in the in the Pont Map and Donntannichan in Roy's map. According to Dwelly 'Samhnach' (f) is a winter grazing or park or can refer to bonfires or torches lit on Hallow-eve or Samhuinn.

In a series of articles and letters in the Oban Times of 1907 and 1908, Fionn(Henry Whyte), connected the bonfires to pre-Christian and later practices where cattle were driven between the two fires of Samhuin and people dowsed their own fires and came to re-light their house fires with embers from the flames.



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Exploring the abandoned village of Barr Glas, Glen Lonan

The Clarks, who were for some generations tenants of the farm (now called Duntanachan) in the late 18th and early 19th century, maintained that the name 'Dùn t-Samhnachan' derived from the fact that the Dùn in question (GR961282) lay beside some deep pools in the River Lonan where historically there were some big river trout to be caught seasonally: these are known locally as 'Samhnachan '. A local place poem collected by John MacCallum Tighnambarr (1851-1929) reads 'Dùn t-Samhnachan nan samhachan ...' which might give credence to the latter theory.

As an aside, the Clarks thought themselves to be a cut above the ordinary, Once in the 19th century there was a wedding at Baile an Dèoir in the old style with two young women and two best men accompanying the groom One of the guests invited was a man, Neill McConacher, who was very poor and ill-dressed on rags of clothes that stank of peat smoke. Miss Sarah Clark of Duntanachan, a very grand lady by one account was also invited. Many people were invited to these weddings and any unusual event at the ceremony and subsequent festivities was gossiped about and commented on for some time afterwards and might be the subject of witty or scurrilous verse by the local bard. On this occasion, it appears Miss Sarah made a remark or maybe a Lain tag about Neil's appearance which he understood. When the time came for each guest to make a short eulogy for the happy couple, Neil stood up and said in Gaelic '*ciod sin e dhomhsa do chrodh do chaorich is do spreidh le splaidhraich Ghreugais is Laidinn Duine mise o bhroinn mo mhathair nach fuiling tàir .Mo nighean donn, cha n'ann air a h-uile cnoc a chi thu Romanach coltach riomsa!*'



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("What do I care for your cows your sheep and your cattle all with their so-called smattering of Greek and Latin . From my mother's womb to this day, I have never been one to suffer contempt. Young brown hired girl, it is not on EVERY hill you will see a Roman like me !")



Examining an old corn-drying pit, Barr Glas, Glen Lonan



Burial mounds/cairns/vallum probably Neolithic at Clenmachrie (Cladh na Macraidh - the graveyard of the Sons) - next to Glenmachrie Farm, Glen Lonan



Bàrr (a) Glas

The name 'Barr Glas' means 'The height which is pale or green'.

Pont shows it as 'Barglas' but in a position where later maps show Sgùil. It is recorded as 'Barraglass' in Roy. The place is recorded in a place poem in the diaries of Alexander Carmichael:

Dùn Tanachain is Barra-Glas
An Sgùil 's Bàrr an Eas,
Lòn a' Chorain 's Barra-Goillean
'S Bealach Chreag Mac Rìgh.

(1) Dùn Tanachain : farm (now known as 'Duntanachan') at GR NM 966 282 Means either 'Fort of the winter grazing' or 'Fort of sacramental fire' or 'Fort where there are sea trout in the river'

(2) Barra Glas : an abandoned settlement at GR NM 9640 2927. Means 'Pale Ridge '

(3) 'Sgùil' :an abandoned settlement probably on the N side of the road E of the stream coming off the hill at Barrguillean . It is shown both in Pont and Roy and was known in local folklore. There is an old archetypical local folktale which tells of a student piper bettering his master at a ceilidh in 'the great Barn of Sgùil'. 'Sgùil' is a Gaelic word which means a 'tray' but also seems to refer to a precipitous place - as in Ben Sguilard. There is a deep ravine /gorge with a waterfall and a glacial 'kettlehole' in the stream behind the possible location of the village and next to the house at Barrguillean. This is probably the 'Sgùil' referred to.

(4) Bàrr an Eas: this means 'ridge with a waterfall.' This is a possible reference to the ridge over which the above waterfall falls. It may, however, refer to the ridge E of Balindore where there is a waterfall.

(5) Lòn a' Chorain: this means 'the sickle shaped meadow '- or 'the meadow by the crescent shaped narrow bend in the stream', possibly a reference to a field name where the field lies beside a distinctive shaped loop in the course of the Luachragan or the lower end of the Barrguilleab Burn. 'Corran (genitive corain) can also refer to a narrowing of a water course - as in Corran Halls and Corran Ferry.

(6) Barrguillean 'is another mystery name. The old settlement seems to have been in the hollow where there is an agricultural nursery now. There is one old (18th century?) building left. The ridge behind it to NW is called 'am Bàrr' and James Whyte in an article in TGSI seems to infer that this feature and other named (but unlocated and unidentified) features in the immediate area are associated with a Celtic warrior figure name Gol (genitive Goille. My own theory is that Barrguillean refers to the watershed 'shoulder' which is in a little pass which splits the Bàrr' and divides the waters flowing to Etive and those flowing to Lusragan or Loch Nell and the sea.

(7) Bealach Chreag Mac Rìgh : This means ' the pass at the rock of the King's son. This is a distinctive rock feature past which an old road (still visible) went up to grazing land and continued on to rejoin the line of the



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present road to Barrguillean, passing the possible location of 'Sgùil' 'The Kings son ' is a mistranslation. The Gaelic grammar is wrong and it is more likely to be a corruption of 'macraidh' - a collective noun for a 'band of young men or sons' - which may refer to the 'Feinne ' and is echoed in 'Cladh na Macraidh - burial place of the band of young men or sons', the farm at the W end of Glen Lonan where there are interesting Neolithic or later burial mounds.

In the book 'The Ruskins', by Alexander Carmichael he describes it as follows:

"The part of Lorne along the shore of Loch Etive is called Muckairn. A number of well known and large farming families from that area disappeared during the Clearances. The MacCalman family of Barraglas had a tanning house near Taynuilt. A man who removes the bark from trees is called 'rusgan' from the Gaelic word 'rusg' meaning rind, peel or bark. The MacCalman family became known as 'na Rusgain', 'na Ruisgairean', or 'Clann Rusgain' because of their occupation

See The Celtic Review vol 2. July 1905 to April 1906. 'The Wake at Bàrr (a) Glas'

There are still ruins of the settlement to be seen in the present forest.

Carmichael says the place was known as Barraglas nan Calman or Barraglas nan Rusgan or Barraglas Chloinn Rusgain. The place is also connected with soldier records of service for Sinclairs in Barraglas. It was still occupied 1841, but empty by 1851.



Clach Dhiarmid
standing stone,
Strontoiller, Glen Lonan



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Visit to Lismore, 26th May 2012

Four members of LAHS took the Appin ferry to Lismore during the Festival of the Sea at the end of May. We met with a few other people and were given a tour and a talk by Robert Hay, concerning the sailing smacks working out of the island, and lime, one of their main cargoes.

The tour visited limestone quarries and lime kilns at Port Ramsay and Sailean. We also visited the museum to see a short film which had been made by three of the mariners who sailed the smacks. We were lucky enough to meet one of them, Duncan Black, during the visit to Port Ramsay.

Figure 1 shows the front of a pair of lime kilns at Sailean, with the quarry in the background. The kilns were 5 to 6 metres high and fitted with an aperture and grate at the base about the size of a domestic fireplace.



Figure 1 – Lime kilns at Sailean

Figure 2 shows the top of these kilns. The holes at the top were 1.5 to 2 metres diameter. In the background are the remains of the workers' cottages, and across Loch Linnhe, the slightly more modern quarry of Glensanda.

The kilns appear to be the same design as was used in many other parts of the UK, so we can guess that they would be used in the same way. Each kiln took a day to load with alternate layers of coal and limestone, the limestone ideally broken into pieces a few centimetres across. The kiln was then fired up for 3 days, and allowed to cool for 2 days. On the last day, the kiln would be emptied from the bottom grate, and the slag separated out from the quicklime. This could either be slaked with water, or loaded as quicklime directly onto the sailing smacks which had brought in the coal.

A brief synopsis of the talk by Robert Hay is included after the photos.



Figure 2 – Top of lime Sailean

Festival of the Sea, 26 May 2012
Shipping and the Lime Industry on Lismore
A Short History



The Helen Brown of Lismore leaving the Gut at Scarinish, Isle of Tiree

The sea has always been important for life on Lismore. There is a long history of fishing, fetching peat and wood fuel from the mainland, and transporting livestock and grain in small boats. In the nineteenth century there were four families of carpenters building sturdy clinker-built dinghies; they included the MacDonalds, based on Port Ramsay, who transferred their business to Oban, and the Connells, based at Balure, who were descendants of the hereditary boatbuilders to the Glenorchy Campbells. You can see some of the MacDonald's tools in the Lismore Museum. As early as the seventeenth century, land was so valuable on the island that the cattle were transported to the surrounding islands (rather than hill sheilings) during the growing season. Seal hunting, smuggling and profiting from wrecks were also features of island life, although the safety of shipping was improved by the building of the lighthouse on Eilean Musdile by Robert Stevenson in 1833.

The sea was part of everyday life: in the 1841 census only four men are described as seamen and none as full time fisherman but the life of the island was changing. By 1871 there were 11 sailors, 6 shipowners or masters, 11 fisherman, 1 boatman and 1 ferryman. This was caused partly by the movement of people from the land and the need to seek alternative employment or emigrate, but a major factor was the coastal trade in coal and lime, which took off in the mid-nineteenth century. Port Ramsay, with its muddy shore and protecting skerries, was the only safe anchorage for the sailing smacks operated by MacCorquodales, Carmichaels and MacDonalds, and they were joined in the 1870s by MacFayden and MacKinnon sea captains from Tiree.

There are traces of early lime burning in small clamp kilns across the island, but larger scale burning began at the end of the eighteenth century at Kilcheran and Sailean, using coal from Lanarkshire. Later there were quarries and kilns at Park, Sheep Island, Alastrath and, Port na Morlach – 14 or 15 kilns are still visible. This was the principal alternative employment on the island, and it was a major operation – producing 48,000 barrels of slaked lime in 1878, mainly for building. (Quarrying tools on display at the Museum).

Undermined by the arrival of the railway at Oban and cheap imports, the operation at Sailean finally closed at the start of the Second World War. The last two smacks to operate from Port Ramsay were the *Mary and Effie* (MacFadyen) and the *Lady Margaret* (MacCorquodale) and, although the MacFadyen boat was equipped with an auxiliary engine, they gave way to West Highland puffers in the 1950s (see the Boats Board in the Museum). They live on in the memory of inhabitants of Port Ramsay (as shown in the Film: *Port Ramsay, Cradle of Master Mariners*), and the rudder post of the *Lady Margaret* lies on the shore at Port Ramsay.

The island has a rich seam of stories of the sea, and the hazards of the coastal trade, particularly the dangers of carrying quicklime fresh from the limekilns, as it heats on contact with water. In 1870, the *Janet of Lismore* (skipper Hector MacKinnon), sailing north in a severe storm, was forced to seek shelter in Gairloch, but the boat dragged its anchor and went aground. The crew were saved by a ‘human chain’ of men from the shore but water entered the hull of the smack and it blew up. Other crews were not so fortunate: in the Museum are portraits of the MacDonald brothers, who drowned off the south end in 1896 when their smack, *The Brothers of Brodick*, foundered.

Seafaring is a continuing theme for Lismore. At www.isleofLismore.com you can find the story of Hugh Anderson, a Lismore bard, and a master of ships carrying explosives for the Nobel Company between 1890 and 1920. You can hear of the deep sea exploits of Duncan Black, Calum MacCorquodale and John MacFadyen, all descendants of Alexander MacFadyen of Tiree in the museum audiovisual display. Today Stuart Ross is master of the *Pole Star*, which maintains Scottish lighthouses and Euain Black is a full-time fisherman, based on the island. The chain continues with two young men who have just graduated with degrees in Marine Operations, in preparation for careers at sea.

Further Reading:

Black, D. 2006. *A Tale or Two from Lismore*. CADISPA/University of Strathclyde
Hay, R. 2009. *Lismore: The Great Garden*. Birlinn, Edinburgh.

See the 2012 Video: [Port Ramsay – Cradle of Master Mariners](#)



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Visit to Dunchraigraig & Ballymeanoch, Kilmartin Glen, 16th September

A small group of members joined Dr Michael Kitchener, a volunteer guide at Kilmartin, for a walk round some of the lesser known monuments in Kilmartin Glen. Michael showed us some of the fascinating wealth of artefacts in the area including a large cup and ring-marked slab, the only henge in Scotland (Ballymeanoch Henge), the stunning Ballymeanoch stone row – thought to be a burial way - and the multi-burial site of Dunchraigraig cairn.



Michael Kitchener explaining some of the mysteries of Ballymeanoch Henge



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Baluachraig stone slab with cup and ring marks, dating from about the second

(Below)
Ballymeanoch Henge and stone row





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25th August - Argyllshire Gathering

As usual the Society had a presence in the Heritage tent at the Argyllshire Gathering on the 25th of August. This is a good opportunity to advertise the Society's existence, sell some of our magazines and be a part of advertising Argyll's history. The feedback is that some people do actively look for the stand and there are always enquiries, and for the visitors we try to improve their knowledge of History and Archaeology. Once again Martin and May Petrie set up the stand and were ably assisted by Alison Blackwood. Although the display had not changed much this year the focus was on The Great Map, 'Roy's Military Survey of Scotland' 1747-55 lent by Martin. Many had no idea of its existence or its availability online nowadays. Several other enquiries involved telling people how to get the best out of internet sites. Any members with new material or ideas for display are welcome to contact the committee.

LAHS Library

As some members will know that the Society library is an underused asset and members need to decide on the future. With the increased spending power of the general public and the advent of the internet, books have become so much more affordable and accessible nowadays and one can argue the value of having a library. I find that I am no longer able to house the library and have therefore boxed it up as it takes around 5m of shelving and it may now be in danger of being stored in an outhouse. Ideally the library should be based in Oban. After seven years it is my intention to step down as Librarian at the AGM this November and not seek re-election.

Recently and with the Committee's encouragement I organised a loan of 48 volumes of PSAS to Dunollie 1745 House to enhance their reading room. There may be a point sometime in the future where some books can be deposited at Dunollie if space became available.

It may be necessary to vote on this library issue.

- Retain library intact and appoint new librarian.
- Reduce the amount of material stored to become more manageable.
- Disperse, sell or give away.

The choice is yours!

Martin Petrie



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Programme for 2012-2013

We have been able to organise some excellent speakers for this season's meetings, so please note the dates in your diaries and tell your friends.

All meetings take place at 7:30 pm in St Columba's Church Hall, Corran Esplanade, Oban, unless otherwise intimated.

Fri 19th October - Angus Martin on 'Kintyre Places and Place-Names'

Fri 2nd November AGM. Your chance to have your say about the Society (at 7:30 in the Roman Catholic Church hall)

Fri 16th November - speaker tba

Fri 14th December - Catherine Gilles on 'The Brooch of Lorn'

Fri 18th January 2013 - Clive Bonsall, topic tba

Fri 15th February - Iain Thornber on 'Behind The Lens Cap – The Life And Work of Christian Cameron of Inverailort (1859-1941)'

Fri 15th March - Steve Mithven on 'Hunter-Gatherers in the Hebrides: Recent Mesolithic excavations on Coll, Mull and Islay'

Fri 19th April - Dr Iain McNicol on 'The Centenary of The Dewar Report - how a medical report transformed Highland Life'

Summer Programme 2013

TBA, but will probably include a visit to Cuil Bay, near Appin, to view some of the historical artefacts in the area



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LORN ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

FRIDAY 4TH NOVEMBER, 2011 AT GLENCRUITTEN CHURCH CENTRE, OBAN AT 7.30 P.M.

Present: Chairman The Rev. Ian Walter
Acting Treasurer Trevor Polley
Membership Secretary Alan Watt
Minutes Secretary Christine Hodge
Committee members Alison Blackwood and Martin Petrie

30 members of the society and visitors.

1. Apologies were received from:

Mr and Mrs Julian Overnell
Mr and Mrs Robert Rae
Dr Peter and Mrs Kemp
Colin Hodge
Judy Watt
Georgina Dalton
Edna Stark.

2. Welcome by the Chairman

The Chairman welcomed members to the AGM

3. Minutes of the AGM 2010

The Chairman noted that these had been circulated. In the absence of any queries, he proposed that they should be accepted and the meeting agreed.

4. Matters Arising

There were none.

5. Reports.

Chairman

The Chairman expressed his thanks to both committee members and others who had helped the Society during the past year. He noted that three Committee members were standing down and thanked respectively Julian Overnell for his excellent editorship of the magazine, Alison Blackwood for her enthusiasm and commitment to the archaeological aspects of the society, in particular encouraging members to get out into



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the field, and Christine Hodge for taking the Minutes at committee meetings. In each case, he said, he had chosen just one contribution as an example, but all three had done much else for the Society.

The 2010-2011 winter programme had proved problematical as only two of the original speakers planned had been able to turn up on the due dates. These were Dr. Kirsty Owen speaking on Stirling Palace and Professor Tony Pollard on Jacobite Battlefields with particular reference to Culloden. The remaining speakers had all had to cancel for various reasons, but happily had been re-booked for the 2011-2012 programme. The Chairman recorded the gratitude of the society to the speakers who had replaced them at short notice, namely Robert Rae, Zoe and Alastair Fleming and Ann MacDonald.

It was hoped that the forthcoming season would run more smoothly, although there had already been one cancellation of a planned talk on the Callender and Oban Railway. The Chairman said that the society would be very grateful if any members knew of a speaker who could give a talk on the Railway and he noted that Bob McCulloch and Charlie Drummond would be focusing to some degree on Transport in their slide show following the evening's business meeting.

The Chairman informed the meeting that in the absence of the Secretary, her report had been circulated and copies were available for members at the meeting.

Treasurer

The acting Treasurer, Trevor Polley, reported that he had only recently taken up the office and was still in the process of sorting out the financial affairs of the society. However, the state of the current account was similar to that of last year, and the Savings Account had gained 52p. He saw no reason to change the level of subscription.

Magazine Editor

Julian Overnell was absent and there was no report to hand, but the Chairman recorded the thanks of the Society to him for his work.

6. Election of Officebearers and Committee

The Chairman reported that three Officebearers and up to six committee members were required. He said that he had been busy with Church work and this left him with limited time to carry out the duties of Society Chairman, but if members were willing to accept this position, he would be willing to stand for re-election. He asked the meeting to appoint a temporary Chairman during the election. Michael Turner proposed Duncan Campbell and this was seconded by the meeting.

Duncan asked for nominations. Ian Walter was proposed by Christine Hodge and seconded by Jim Macleod. There were no further nominations and Ian was elected unanimously. He resumed Chairmanship of the meeting.



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Joan Kemp had indicated she was willing to stand again as Secretary. She was proposed by Sheena Macleod, seconded by Bill Grant and elected unanimously.

Acting Treasurer Trevor Polley was proposed as Treasurer by Duncan Campbell, seconded by Alison Blackwood and elected unanimously.

Committee Members:

Martin Petrie and Alan Watt were proposed by the Chairman and elected unanimously.

The Chairman asked for further nominations for the committee. He outlined the responsibilities of the committee and the frequency of meetings. There were no further nominations forthcoming.

7. AOCB

There was none

8. Date of next year's AGM is to be Friday, 2nd November, 2012.

