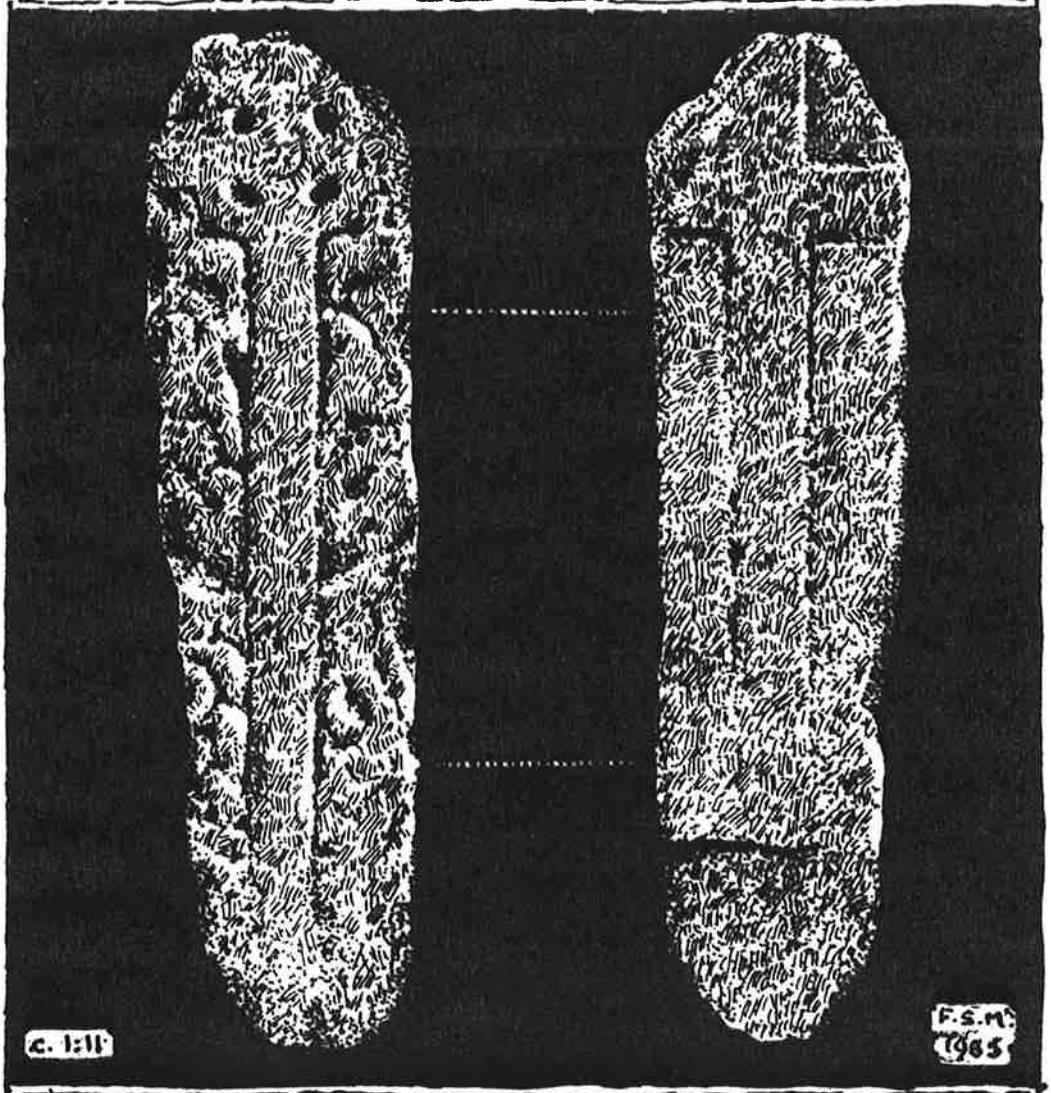
Stone at Kilmahumaig



The KIST 32

T H E K I S T

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The Natural History & Antiquarian Society
of Mid-Argyll

President: Miss Campbell of Kilberry, FSA, FSA Scot.

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AIRD PUBLIC SCHOOL, CASTLETON

Dr Malcolm Shaw

Now an attractive, much modified private dwelling-house in Castleton, beside the main Lochgilphead-Inverarary road, this sturdy stone-built building was once Aird Public School, to which its former pupils owe such a debt. The building comprised a single class-room, and living quarters for the one-teacher staff. The school was opened under the authority of the Lochgilphead School Board in 1875; it was taken over by the Argyll Education Authority under whose auspices it was eventually closed in June 1945. Facilities were of the most meagre: except for the path from the entrance gate to the door, the playground was as nature meant it and grand for mud-slides in season, enclosed by a wall backed up with whin bushes. Toilets were provided, admittedly separate for boys and girls, but of the dry-closet type. An open-fronted shed with a cinder floor provided our shelter from the weather, and the only source of water was a tap behind the main building, exposed to every frost. The sole heating arrangement was an open fire on the far wall of the school-room, and I do not wonder now why chilblains - and broken ones too - were so prevalent among the children.

The school provided what would nowadays be referred to as primary education, but in most cases it was the entire academic education that the pupils received. I was a pupil during the 1920s, and to the best of my knowledge, only one other boy (Dr John McTavish of Castleton Cottages and Millport) actually proceeded to higher levels and University. The ladder of further education in these days for the Castleton children was via Lochgilphead Higher Grade School and then on to either Dunoon or Oban for secondary studies: help from bursaries was available from the County on passing the requisite examinations.

I sat under that doyenne of teachers, Miss Annie Blue, remembered today vividly by even those she taught before the first war. She was appointed to Aird from Ashfield (over the hill) in 1910, and she remained there as sole teacher until transferred to Dalavich, Lochaweside in 1929. That she was not everybody's favourite is no over-statement, but for her teaching ability we who benefitted from it then

are still doing so. I have consulted with others who were pupils before me, and in no case can we recall Miss Blue ever being off duty, yet over the years we now realise that many a time she must have felt like barring the door. Nor can we recollect her having any local friends on whom she could call, although her brother was the respected Head in Ardrishaig.

Our day started at 10 a.m., invariably with a Scripture lesson and a grounding in the Shorter Catechism at least up to Q.100. We closed at 4 p.m., the boys finishing off with a period of drawing ("remember your clear lining, boys"), and for the girls "Put away your seams" was the unfailing formula for the school to skail. Arithmetic and Mental Arithmetic were strong points with Miss Blue, and even to this day her pupils have no need for pocket calculators: Mental Arithmetic also featured in examinations, and we could repeat and utilise the multiplication tables so conveniently printed on the back outside cover of the catechism. A special feature of her syllabus was Oral English, for which each pupil had to deliver a story, the idea being to facilitate expression and improve diction. I do not suppose she could do much to affect our local accent, but she could better our delivery. I remember one boy, giving a vivid account of the supposed encounter of a spectator at the zoo: having taken a huge draught of water, an elephant directed its trunk towards the man, but Miss Blue suggested a more felicitous expression could be found for the punch-line "and splootered the water all over the man". Another remarkable feature of her training, even for such a mixed bunch as we must have presented to her, was a thorough grounding in the modulator for the training of the ear in music. Without benefit of keyboard or tuning-fork she revealed the secrets of sharps, flats and intervals in the musical scale, and thanks to her so getting through to us, I can still jot down the solfa notation of any tune I hear. In contrast to what the pupils receive today she gave us a lot of poetry which has remained a constant delight for me over the intervening years, and we also had to memorise well-known biblical texts.

One of our more memorable activities was outdoor P.T. From time to time, the weather being suitable, ex-Sgt. Major Barnaby would appear from Lochgilphead, and the whole school would troop out to do his bidding on the main road. Such

was the infrequency of traffic in those years that we were very seldom interrupted throughout his period: only the local laird had a car then, and occasionally there was a Trojan van of a well-known brand of tea. Sgt.Major Barnaby invariably finished his exercises with arms moving in time to the tune of "White Wings". Miss Blue did not take us out of doors for nature knowledge, but every Friday in season each one of us had to bring into the class-room some specimen, whether it be a leaf, flower, root etc., and she described and named each item that lay on her table for the benefit of the whole assembly - such is one advantage of a one-room, one-teacher school.

Having opened 3 years before, Aird School could boast a roll of 48 in 1878, and in the 1920s there must have been around 20 attending: when closed in 1945 the roll had fallen to 11 pupils. These children came from Castleton (farm and cottages), Silvercraigs and Burnside, Rosehill and Achnaba, Ballibeg and Ballimor with Lingerton: for a time too from Duncholgan. Our dinner hour was officially 1 - 2p.m., but without the shackles of time, and with our pieces to sustain us, we roamed far and wide, not one of us having a timepiece - only some sharp ear could detect Annie Blue's far-away whistling. In summer we were barefoot, and some of the older boys could explore as far as Acres and Old Achnaba; the Blue Quarry and up the Cut were favourite haunts for hazel nuts and brambles. The March Dyke was a constant source of amazement: surely the Great Wall of China could not be more massive, and I still marvel at it each time I pass.

There were two highlights to our school session: the annual Christmas treat at the Big House, and the Prize Giving at the close of the school year. The Christmas outing was arranged by our Laird and his Lady, Mr & Mrs John Graham Campbell, Yr. of Shirvan (respectfully referred to as Mr & Mrs Jock Shirvan). For the big occasion we gathered at the schoolhouse and marched to Shirvan House (now Castleton House), headed by Miss Blue, and by her dictate "the big boys will take up the rear". Here we were regaled to an ample repast at a large table set out in the commodious kitchen, but my abiding memory of this part of the gathering is of the enormous gleaming range. There followed a magic lantern show, surely the latest thing in technology, and finally a lucky dip. At that

time the possession by a boy of a rubber ball of any size was treasure indeed: I still tingle with the excitement when I recognised as a ball what my groping fingers had seized upon in the depths of the bran - only to find on bringing it to the light of inspection that what I had retrieved was a baby's rattle, to my eternal chagrin that my family never forgot. The other highlight of our session was the annual Prize Giving ceremony, which our Laird and his wife again graced with their presence. Jock Shirvan gave a short address, extolling the chance we were being offered of a sound education, and it will be understood that his was the only voice we children ever heard with a marked English accent: inevitably it was for ever associated in our minds that authority speaks with such an accent, and this was ingrained in our make-up throughout these formative years. On one occasion he painted a picture of our future, indicating that the boys could become "farmers, shepherds, ploughmen and engineers"; if that is spoken in what to our ears was a pronounced English accent, it will not be wondered at that the effect on our untutored minds was considerable. For this high social event, best clothes were called for, and I know one boy who was not allowed to attend the prize-giving on one occasion because his trousers were not good enough - his prizes were brought home by the others of the family.

Nowadays it would be said that Miss Blue lived on a short fuse and that she frequently blew her top: doubtless she was sorely tried and provoked, and we must make allowances in retrospect that on many an occasion she was not feeling at her best. Ironically enough the only scene I remember was following one annual visit by the saintly Dr Robertson of Lochgilphead Parish Church, who came towards the end of the session to conduct the examination in Scripture Knowledge. In Miss Blue's estimation we had not comported ourselves at all well, and he had scarcely left the premises when she exploded, visiting each one of us with her manifest displeasure. Nevertheless our abiding impression is that she imbued in each one of us that sense of discipline, and recognition of lawful authority, which is surely the hallmark of a good citizen. Whatever alchemy she employed in her methods, her pupils had no trouble with spelling, we had a fair idea of the history of our country and of the geography of the world. The wall was liberally

hung with maps: at my right elbow for many a period, there was a map of the world on Mercator's projection, and at my eye-level were Australia and New Guinea. A river was marked in New Guinea running SE towards the Gulf of Papua called the Fly River: not many people know about this river, and I basked in anticipation that if ever I were asked about it in an examination, I would floor the examiner. Unfortunately the occasion has never arisen, and that piece of knowledge is still occupying my department of useless information.

On passing the Qualifying Examination, I proceeded to Lochgilphead Higher Grade School, cycling in each day from Silvercraigs. There I came under the influence of that peerless teacher of Science and Mathematics, Mr James Mitchell. From there I went on to Dunoon Grammar School for my Secondary course, again on passing the requisite examination: on enrolling there I was asked whether I proposed taking Higher or Lower Mathematics, and when the Master heard I was a product of Lochgilphead school, he replied: "It's the Higher Class for you".

Although Gaelic was spoken in many of the houses represented in Aird School, it was never heard in the playground: English was used exclusively even by those fluent in the parental tongue. It was felt by many parents that for the children to succeed in the world, they had a big enough task mastering the one language of official education, and so Gaelic was allowed to atrophy. There were some parents however who decided that Gaelic is not heavy to carry through life, and so continued its use in family conversation: thanks to them the old tongue can still be heard. For many of those others, they have been likened to the Highland shepherd's dog, in that they can understand a few words of Gaelic but cannot speak it.

It is easy to look back now with a critical eye on what more could have been done, but we must not judge the past by the present. We had not a vestige of local history, far less organised outings: the significance of Dunadd was a closed book, not even mentioned. Anyway Saturdays were too occupied with work on the home croft, or procuring the messages from Lochgilphead. We had plenty of homework too, poetry to learn, and we had the free use of the library in the school, donated by Coats, if so inclined. One continuing regret that remains with me over the years, is

that I was never able to get tuition in the playing of the bagpipes; many years later while on holiday in Islay, I got into conversation with a famous teacher of the pipes and I asked if it was now too late for me to take them up. He looked me up and down, and said "You'll be over 40!" I was over 40, and that was that for ever.

It would be fair to conclude that Aird School was distinguished not by the gathering of honours and academic accolades, but by the esteem in which it was held by those who attended it and their opinion as to how it had prepared them for life. They were afforded a sound basis of elementary education which has served them better than they could have realised at the time, and which has continued to support them nobly through the years. For my part I am sure I have to thank even its very name: probably all unwittingly it served me better than I could have envisaged. At the beginning of the last war I applied for admission to the Indian Medical Service, a prestigious branch of H.M.Forces, and of course had to submit a list of my educational qualifications. In all innocence and naivete I indicated that I had received my primary education at Aird Public School. When I was called for interview to the India Office in London, the members of the panel were most intrigued at where this Public School was: I replied in all honesty, down Loch Fyneside. I do not know whether they knew where Loch Fyne was, but I was accepted, and it was only much later along the road of sophistication that I came to realise what a "Public School" is in England.

Aird Public School and Miss Annie Blue have done me well, and each time I pass that building, on the road where we used to do our P.T., I utter a silent thank you.

I am indebted to Mr Murdo MacDonald, Archivist, for the dates mentioned above in connection with Aird School, and with Miss Blue's tenure of office there as sole teacher.

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Editorial Note :- Readers who have the misfortune of not knowing the locality written about by Dr Shaw may like to have a grid reference for Aird School. It is NR 882854.

THE CRINAN CANAL CUP-MARKED STONE

Some years ago, when lack of water practically closed the canal, Mr & Mrs Andrews, with their extremely shallow-draft yacht, were just able to scrape through. A short distance east of the Crinan Ferry swing bridge a boulder stood revealed in a lagoon (NR792938) off the canal fairway, and on its surface Mrs Andrews' trained eyes saw cup marks; subsequent investigation with a dinghy confirmed at least 11 of them. There matters rested until the winter of 1985-6, when the canal was drained and a complete examination became possible despite the hazards of the intervening depth of soft mud - 6'6" by actual sounding. This project was undertaken by Colin Fergusson, who so arranged matters that the President, with Miss Sandeman and the Editor, reached the rock safely although he himself had earlier foundered. What had been regarded as an erratic boulder now revealed itself to be a massive fallen section of the local outcrop, with only the top showing above the mud, as proved by the bedding planes not being conformable with the adjacent exposed strata (quoting Miss Sandeman). The erosion of softer strata on the lower part had given the appearance of an ice-carried rock. Twenty-two cups and a possible twenty-third were counted, diminishing in size from a diameter of 6", and all on the upper north-east-sloping smooth surface, which measures approximately 7'6" x 5'. Originally the site would be a broad short declivity running down to the tidal waters of the Add estuary. The construction of the canal embankment cut it off from the river, and the much higher canal level transformed it into a shallow mud-filled lagoon with the stone projecting above the mud but submerged. If it had been only a few feet nearer the line of the canal fairway it would have suffered removal during construction.

Cup marks are extremely rare in the immediate area, though abundant outwith a radius of a mile or two, and only a group of five others has been reported on a stone in the wall of a barn near Crinan Harbour (NR784940). Uncertainty remains regarding those in the canal; were they carved on the fallen rock or were they already present when it fell? The former seems perhaps the more likely.

.....oooOooo.....

The CHARITIE of the BOXE

F.S.Mackenna

The advent of a Welfare State is apt to make us lose sight of conditions two or three hundred years ago when a floating population depended upon indiscriminate charity for its precarious existence. Kirk records, mainly Lowland, contain much information, for they itemise the day-to-day disbursements from the 'boxe' in addition to telling us where its contents came from. There were the weekly collections from the congregation, many of whom were themselves almost as much in need of assistance as the recipients of its bounty. The Stool of Repentance was another regular contributor to the 'boxe', for its incumbents were usually required to make a donation in addition to all the stress of being its occupant. Further increments came from the hire of the mort cloth and sundry other chargeable activities of the kirk. But, with every source accounted for, the 'boxe' was often sorely strained to meet the calls made on it. Apart from contributions towards the beggars and indigent parishioners, it had to deal with the upkeep of the kirk. A routine examination of its contents could be far from encouraging. "The Session mett and compted the Boxe, and found it to be the sum of forty-four pounds, of which there was twelve pound eighteen shillings in money, sixteen pound sixteen of doits, and fifteen pound of ill hapenyes". A clear call for redoubled use of the Stool!

(N.B. Bear in mind that the above sums and all others in this paper were Scots, which was one-twelfth the value of Sterling. So our 'compting' Session found they had only £1.1s.6d Stg on this particular occasion).

A recurrent expense was incurred by the breaking of the 'bell tow', an event much to be anticipated if the activities of one 'beddell' were at all prevalent amongst his fellow exponents, for he rang the Kirk bell "for the maist pairt of the whole afternoon".

Sometimes a bell itself had to be replaced, and this could precipitate a monetary crisis. "Gifen to bouy ane steane of irone for the bell 1lb(sic) 8s"; "the chainzey to the bell 1lb."; "for meat and drink to the smith and beddell at working and stryking out the irrane for the bell chainzey, eleven shillings"; "to buy ane bell tow, one pound five shillings". The mort cloth was another

item which was constantly in need of repair, but this was worth doing since the fee for its use was a substantial source of income. "For sarge and threed to mend the mort cloth, sixteen shillings". Some kirks had two of these articles, the older for the less discriminating poor and the newer for the better-off. One mort cloth had cost a hundred and forty three pounds and its hire was fixed at one pound-four within the parish and one pound-ten without, but it was not unknown for the fee to be as high as three pounds.

Deserving residents in the parish were most often helped 'in kind', usually with meal or related items. "Gifen to ane puir woman within the paroch ane firlot of oats".

Occasionally one finds donations from the 'boxe' going to objects far removed from its own area, and, one might have thought, far outwith any possible sphere of local responsibility. "For the liberation of certain Scottis taken by the Turkis"; "for the supply of the citizens of Glasgow whose houses were burnt with fire"; "to the use of the bridge at Callendar"; "for building a Herbour at St. Andrews"; these two last being located far from that particular parish.

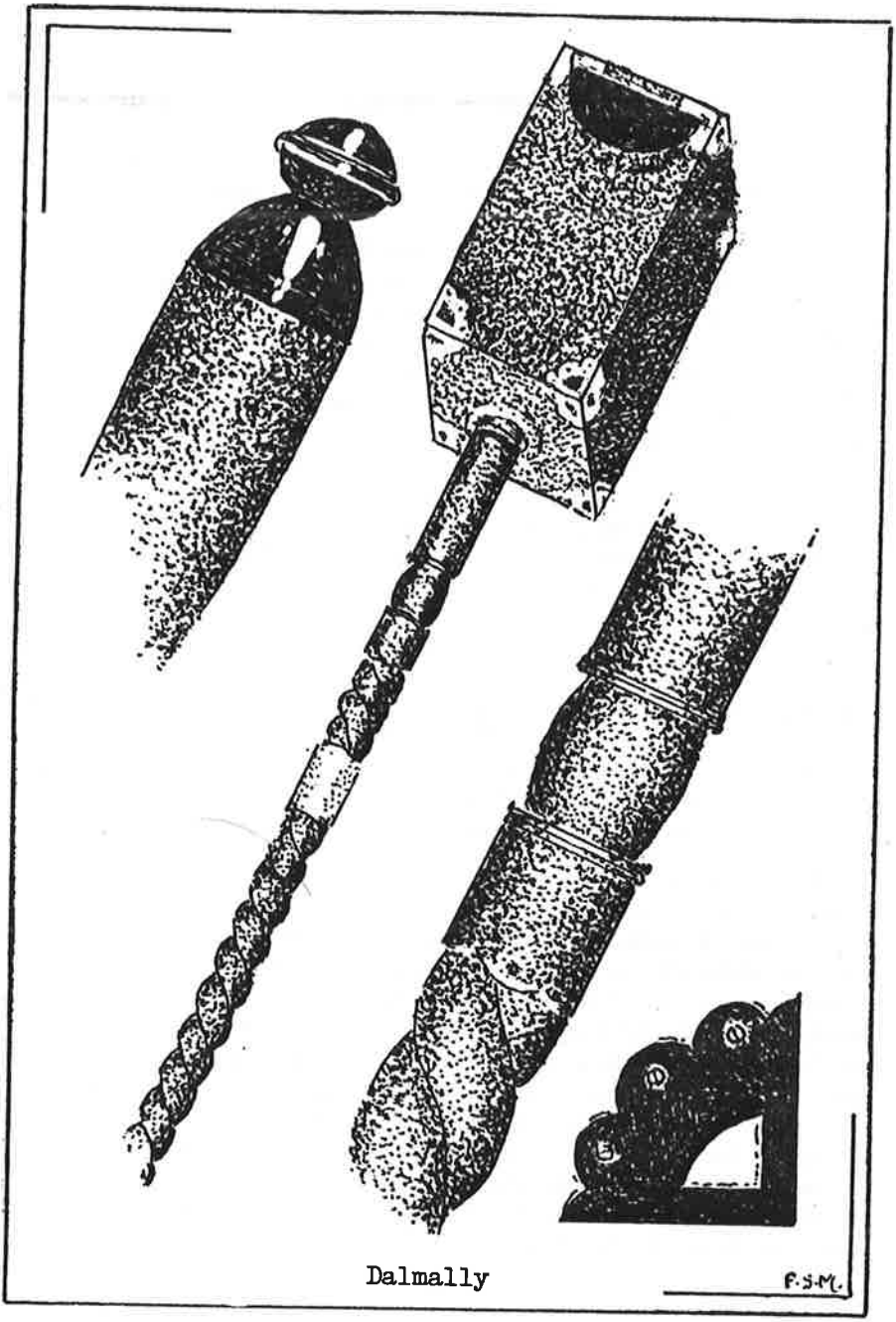
In the itinerant crowd of beggars, some of whom travelled in gangs, there was a good proportion of 'sturdy sorners' who found this an agreeable mode of life, but our interest lies in the constant stream of human flotsam which was in no way bogus or undeserving of the 'charitie of the boxe' and it is with these that we find ourselves most in sympathy. Some had secured a beggar's badge, and more had 'recommendations' from other ministers. A mere recital of their claims to charity sheds a lurid light on social conditions at that period.

"To a slave from Africa, 2d"; "to 2 poor seamen broke at Greenock, 3 happens"; "to a poor sick man with a large family of children from Kintyre a penny"; "to a poor seaman captivated by the Turkis and had his tounge cut out, four shillings"; "to ane puir man that lost all by fire and two children burnet and had his two eyes burnt out, twelve shillings"; "to a young man wanting both feet, sixteen shillings", and so on.

All were deemed worthy of compassion (and sometimes of credulity), but it is disturbing to find the Session delib-

erately consigning those in its care to a life of vagrancy. Foundlings and orphans were a sore charge on the 'boxe' and had to be got rid of as soon as possible. "The minister and elders, after calling on God, haveing taken to consideration the great burden that the two orphants were both to the parioch and sessions, and considering that the eldest of them was able to travell throw the paroch and seek his meat in the sommertime, doe appoint Robert Neil to enjoyne him where to goe for the first four or five days till he know quhair to goe, and in the meantime to keep the youngest, till the bairn be removed at the session's pleasure". Thus was the elder, and eventually also the younger, firmly and deliberately set on a life of beggary, with absolutely no hope of escape.

In collecting from the congregation the apparatus often was a box on the end of a long handle, known as a 'ladle'. This enabled two elders, one working from either side, to reach between them the full length of the pews. Such contrivances are still in use here and there in Scotland. The Glenorchy Church at Dalmally and St.Conan's at Lochawe possess four antique ladles, three of them being particularly interesting. First of all there are a pair - one of them shown here - which have their walnut or yew-veneered boxes and barley-sugar-twist handles mounted in brass. Their total length is 3' 5". The third example matches these two except that it lacks the brass mounts and the twist of the handle goes in the opposite direction. The fourth ladle is quite different, with a plain turned handle and larger, flat box. One of the mounted pair has



Dalmally

suffered loosening of the veneer through damp. One of the mounted examples and its unmounted counterpart have had their handles broken - one some time ago, the other quite recently; they have been repaired by brass bands.

It has not been possible to establish any history for these ladles but the three more elaborate examples may well be of 18th century date.

It would have been satisfactory to find a 'boxe' accompanying these ladles, to hold the proceeds of their collecting, but there is no trace of one at Dalmally; possibly the fact that the 'boxe' was a box and capable of being put to secular uses, might account for its eventual detachment from the ladles when its original purpose became outmoded and it was no longer required. The ladles, on the other hand, have retained their purpose to the present day and have thus escaped the 'boxe's fate.

The Revd. Mr Hogg has been extremely kind and helpful in this enquiry regarding these delightful antiques, of which he is the present custodian. Grateful thanks are proffered.

...odoOooo...

Ultimatum Issued by Dunlop Parish Church, Ayrshire in 1780

The following 'Intimation' bears very suitably on the subject just dealt with, as showing what Kirk Sessions had to contend with in their efforts to secure funds.

Intimation is hereby made to this congregation that as there is a great deal of bad silver at present in circulation and several bad shillings have of late been given in to the Collection it is therefore requested that none will presume for the future to dispose of their base money in that way else if they do and it can be traced they will be called upon to make restitution and be treated as cheaters and robbers of the Poor and it is expected that the Elder who collects will pay particular notice to what silver he changes as it is in this way the fraud must be committed.

With certification that if any more imposition of this kind happen again the practice of changing at the Plate will be discontinued as dangerous and improper.

THE KILMAHUMAIG STONE

Marion Campbell

Like the Inverlussa cross (Kist 31) this is a new discovery by the experts of the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historic Monuments, and a foretaste of the treasures to be shown in Vol.6 of the Argyll Inventory. It lies in the small cemetery of Kilmahumaig near Crinan, close to a ruin which may be the last vestige of a mediaeval chapel.

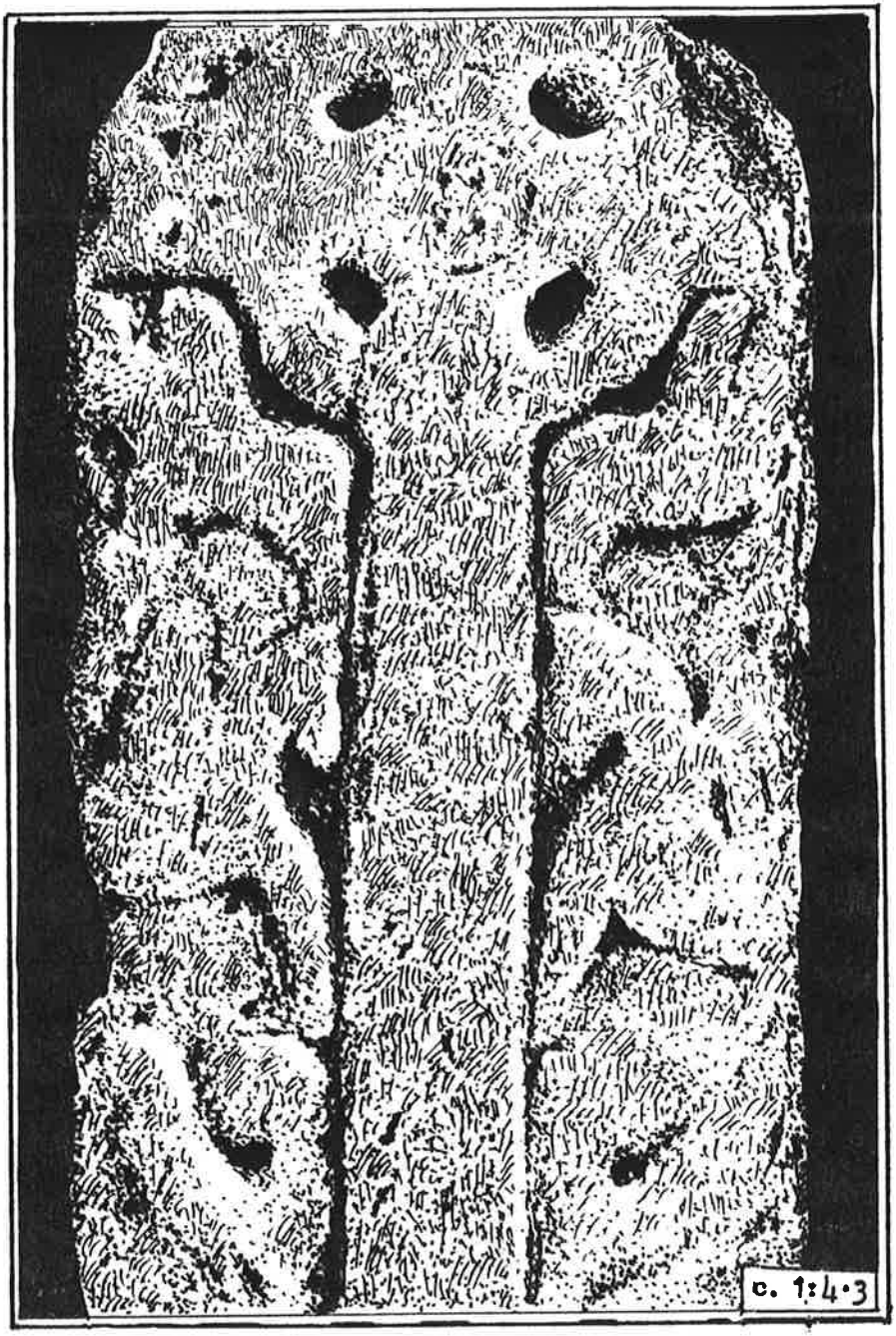
The name implies an early Christian site, the cella of Cummene. Both the syllable mo- and the diminutive aig are endearments; 'My dear wee Cummie' would be the Scots equivalent. There was a Cummene the White, Abbot of Iona 657-669, author of a lost work on Columba's miracles, who might have been commemorated at Crinan by a pupil, or might himself be the founder.

The stone is unusual in having two pairs of horsemen beside the shaft. There are strong affinities with Pictish designs, as the Editor points out, but I think one must be wary of making too elaborate an interpretation of such a worn carving. Both Saxon and Pictish artforms were of interest to Dalriadic designers.

These riders share with the Pictish horsemen, and with others in the Book of Kells, a curious knack of 'sitting down in the saddle' to an extreme degree. The artists of the time seem to have had a strange inability to work out exactly how rider and horse connect.

Before we all mount our hobbyhorses and set off after the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, we should look across the little glen from the graveyard to the massive conical mound which faces it. This is Dun Domhnuill, reputed to be a Judgment Seat of the Lords of the Isles, which once had 'a stone chair upon its summit' (according to Currie's North Knapdale). The mound may well be a prehistoric grave in origin, and may have been a focal point for the neighbourhood long before the Lordship. Our stone might commemorate a meeting of chiefs or a treaty between tribes, agreed at the mound and sealed on holy ground.

There remains the possibility that the carver simply enjoyed a pleasantly balanced design. Whatever the truth may be (and we are unlikely to know it), we again congratulate the Commission on yet another significant discovery.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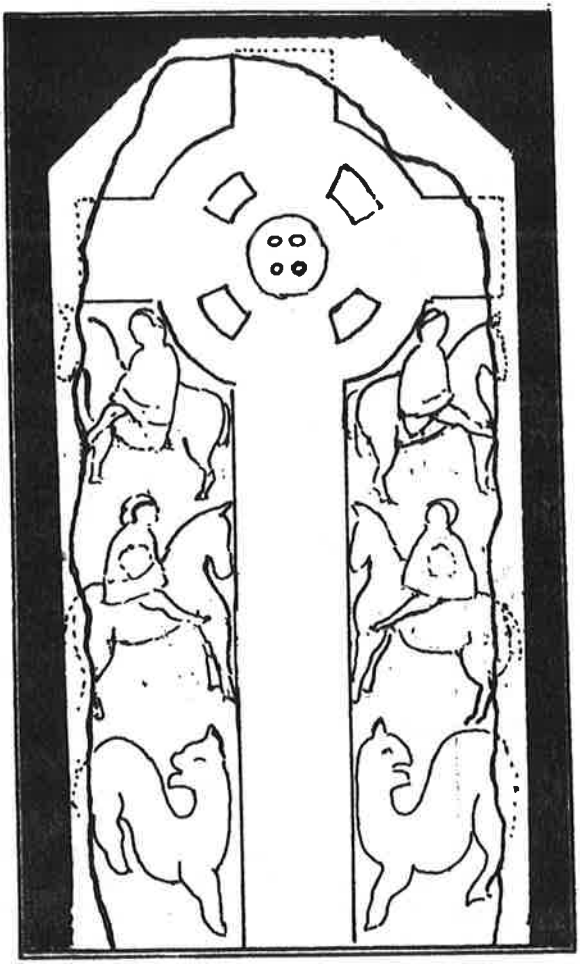


A Realisation of the Carving, by the Editor

The obvious affinities between this stone and the elaborate Pictish specimens from the east of Scotland justify using them as a basis for comparison. The line drawing, which omits the lower plait panels, shows clearly this influence in our stone. By analogy there should be an all-round border to the carving but the edges are much broken and all trace of any such border is lost. The surface of the cross bears, as it should, very faint vestiges of decoration. The original shape, shown here, is conjectural.

FROM A TARBERT BAKER'S DAY BOOK 80 YEARS AGO

Mr A.J.MacSporran has kindly shown us a tradesman's Day Book started by the Tarbert baker William Smith in March 1905, and it is thought that some details from it may be of both general and local interest. Although Smith seems to have commenced as a baker it becomes apparent within a few years that he was dealing also in groceries and even farm supplies - by 1910 his Bill Head, after listing various flours and household meals continues "Feeding Wheat, Barley, Oats and Mixed Grain, Bran, Thirds, Baled Hay and Straw etc etc.", but long before that some of his customers were getting all manner of groceries and even fish.

The bakery side was not neglected, for we read "Medal and Diploma awarded for Bread, London 1909" and in 1936 (by then Wm Smith & Sons) there was a Commendation (for the second time) for Shortbread at a Glasgow exhibition.

Some entries give a good idea of prices eighty years ago:- 4 lbs tea and 2 bottles vinegar 9/-, 3 lbs haddocks 1/3, ½ doz eggs 8d, 1 lb butter 1/2.

Apart from long-standing bad debts there were other worries - "Gigha. June 28th (no year). Mr W.Smith. I am sending ½ loaf & 1 biscuit to lett you see the way the hens is eating the Bread in the Hamper. Alec Orr."

It may be of interest to give a list of some of the people who figure in the early part of this Day Book, starting 17.3.05 and ending Dec. 1910. A few of the houses are still occupied by descendants of the original customers. Ardencraig, Capt. Bliss; Ashens, Mrs Kennedy; Battery Cott. Mrs Kirk; Bunawe, Mrs Scott; Breadalbane, Mrs Nelson, Mrs Pearman, Mrs Roxburgh; Craigard, Mrs Blackwood, Mrs Duncan, Mrs Sinclair; Concrete, Mrs Jas.McFarlane, Mrs John McFarlane, Mrs Taylor; Dunolly, Mrs Campbell; Dunolly Cott. Mrs Brodie; Dunmore Cott. Mrs F.Smith; Finlaggan, Mrs J. Wilson; Glenellen, Mrs Weir; Glencoe, Mrs McFatson (? Mac Fadzean); Glenmorven, Mrs McLeod; Holly Bank, Mrs Currie; Heathfield, Mrs Monteith; Ingleside, Mrs Latham; Lorne Villa, Mrs Alex. Macfarlane; Mealdarroch, Mrs Kennedy, Mrs McKinnon; Pier House, Mrs Allan; Rosemount, Mrs Cameron, Mrs G.Macalpine; Sea View, Mrs Fife; Seafield, Mrs Miller, Mrs Sheridan, Mrs Yorke; Torrisdale, Mrs J. Macdougall; Torrisdale Cott. Mrs McLeod; Victoria Bank, Mrs Thomson.

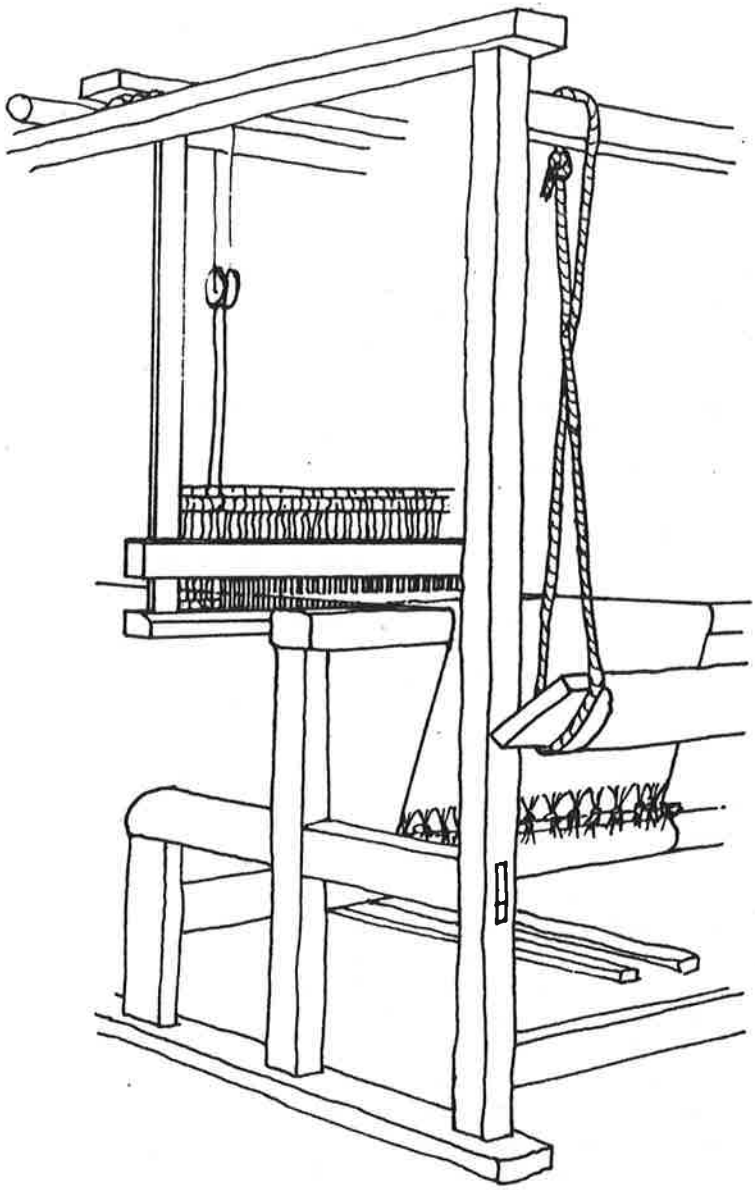
AUCHINDRAIN'S LOOM

Ruth Cammock

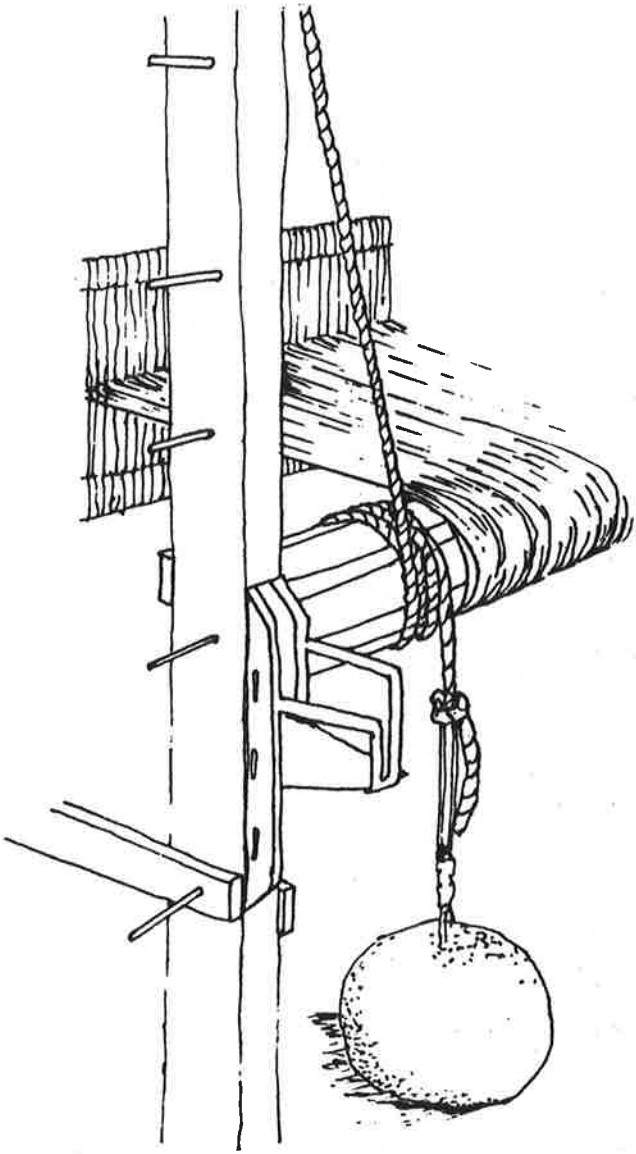
Among the exhibits at Auchindrain Museum is a loom. At first sight it looks like a typical handweaver's loom such as was in use all over Argyll a hundred years ago, but closer inspection reveals differences. It is in fact much older. When two of our members first saw it at Kilmory Knap (NR702750) in 1929, they were told by the owner that it had been built there out of driftwood by one of his forefathers "about two hundred years ago". He valued it highly, although by then he was actually using a newer loom. He was John McTaggart, the Weaver of Knap, an old man whose family had been weavers there for generations, but who had no son to follow him. He had prospered in his day and had built himself a new house for his retirement in 1912 - the present "Tigh an Fhigheadair". This had a lean-to shed at the rear where the two looms stood when our members visited him in 1929, and where, many years later when one of them bought the house from old John's descendants, a bundle of sticks and spars was identified as the old loom and presented to the Museum.

Setting it up for exhibition proved difficult, for some pieces were missing, as was only to be expected. The main framework is a roughly cubical structure, approximately six feet in height, width and depth, and consists of rectangular-section timbers 4"x4", 4"x2", and 6"x2". The exact dimensions would seem to be fortuitous, for some of the posts have marks and holes quite unrelated to the present structure: doubtless vital to a previous one. The beam from which the shafts are suspended looks waterworn and is more or less cylindrical, but the overslung batten is made of lighter machine-sawn members. The joints are of mortice and tenon type.

The bench seat, slung by cords from the beam above, has been polished by generations of weavers' bottoms and must be one of the original bits. Of particular interest to a modern handweaver are the mechanisms for the moving parts, including great wooden spikes thrust through holes in the cloth beam and the warp roller to turn them. It is not clear quite how the warp roller was fixed, though there are suggestive grooves near the ends of this 6" diameter octagonal "beam" where ropes could have been wound holding heavy stones as weights. A "stackweight" with an



AUCHINDRAIN'S LOOM · FRONT *note weaver's seat and batten.*



BACK : Probable method of fixing warp roller with rope and weight

iron hook in it is said to exist at Auchindrain, so perhaps the method could be tried. The cloth beam is held firmly by a large metal box ratchet and a wooden pawl over 15 ins. long which pivots on a metal peg in a hole in the adjacent side beam. The top member of the batten has metal pins at each end lying in the corrugations of metal strips on the main frame, so that the batten can be moved forward and back as the weaving progresses.

There are four shafts - though tied in pairs at present - and these with their string heddles look quite familiar to a modern weaver. So does the reed, but we know that old reeds, made with real reeds instead of metal teeth, were used on this loom. They were separately stored and it is to be hoped they are not lost. Yew shuttles were also seen in a drawer in the weaver's house, but the one displayed here may or may not have been used with this loom. The maximum weaving width is 40 inches, which is still the accepted maximum for hand-thrown shuttles today. Blankets had to be two joined strips of "blanketting" - usually each 28 - 29 inches after shrinkage. So our weaver would have used 32 - 33 inches of his loom most of the time.

Only two pedals were found, so the loom was tied up with two lamms to weave a short length of woollen cloth in plain-weave for exhibition purposes. It was almost certainly used as a counterbalanced four-shaft loom, making twills and possibly tartans in its heyday.

John McTaggart's newer loom was larger, probably with a fly shuttle for speedier weaving. But a modern domestic handloom, built to do the same work as the Museum exhibit, is slightly smaller - a four foot cube or thereabouts. The main timbers can be bolted together and the ratchets and pawls, though still iron, are smaller and neater devices for maintaining warp tension. Otherwise it is a very similar piece of equipment, after 250 years.

Our Museum loom must have been in use from about 1750 till 1900. In the cities of the south things were different. Water power brought the looms together into big mills - New Lanark cotton mill had 2000 employees in 1799 - and even the big draw looms and dobbies, used for the elaborate patterns of Paisley shawls, became mechanised. The Yorkshire woollen mills and Lancashire cotton mills expanded rapidly, and commercial handweaving came to an end. Here, however on May 23rd 1887 "McTaggart the weaver

from Kilmory Knap came [to Kilberry Castle] and took away a lot of yarn to weave"(1), almost certainly the John McTaggart who showed our members his old loom 40 years later.

"A lot of yarn" implies a lot of preparation - carding, spinning, washing and dyeing. Old account books suggest that the mistress of the Big House organised all this, though the actual work would be done by tenants' wives from nearby cottages. When the wool clip was sold, some was retained for the needs of the household:- (2)

1844 soda for Mrs Campbell (? washing wool) .. 3/-
for carding wool, to Mrs Campbell 7/6
1846 Paid for wools to Mrs Campbell 12/-
Ditto for carding wool £1.0.0
1852 Wool sold to McCalman ..... 76 stone
Presented to J.McMillan's wife for house 2 stone

Some of the dyeing was done by the customer and some by the weaver himself, but for special colours we find:-

1844 Paid dyer at Lochgilphead for working tartan 13/6

Then a Spinning Day at the Castle was arranged. The men brought the wheels. Refreshments were provided, and a day's spinning in lieu of rent was undertaken by women from all the cottages around. It was, apparently, a hilarious party,(3) but "a lot of yarn" thus became available for the weaver to collect.

Handweavers did not always work to order. In earlier days, when money as such was less common, part of the rent was often paid in kind:- (4)

1744 Malcolm McAlbride (smallholder in Kilberry)
pays three yards linning ..... £1 .16.0
1756 Jas.McInturner (in Moninernich) paid by
weaving- 38 ells temming @ 5d per yd 15/10
29 ells linning @ 3d per yd 7/3
1761 James Turner in Moninernich paid by
working 34 ells blanketting 5/-
1771/2 Dugald Monro, weaver in Douner Shirdrim,
pays a twenty shilling note and, for
work at weaving 11/6½
Paid by working
15 ells blanketting @ 2½d per ell.
9 ells @ 2d. 5/3

It seems likely that our loom was involved in transactions such as these.

Towards the end of this handweaving period, in John

McTaggart's time, there were fewer weavers - for indeed there were fewer settlements: their inhabitants had gone to America. Kilberry went further afield with his orders:-

1844 John Galbraith (at Lochgilphead) for weaving tartan and blankets £1.13.6

1845 To Lochgilphead market.
Neil Galbraith, weaver 10/-

1846 To Dugald Campbell, weaver £10.0

1893 Sent to Houston's of Greenock for plaids.

By now handspinning had become uneconomic and handweaving, even in Argyll, was rapidly following suit. Our old loom must have stood idle in its shed for much of the time.

Modern handweavers are not truly heirs to John McTaggart, for most of them are amateurs, weaving as a hobby. The few who do earn their living by their craft rely on their artistic skills in colour and design to produce luxury articles which can command a high price - certainly not ells and ells of blanketting. (5) All the same it is satisfactory to know that his skills have not been lost. There are among our members a few who could use the old loom, should that ever again become necessary, and there are loom makers today whom we could call upon to make replacements for missing parts and put it in good order again.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am indebted to Noel Hall for help in measuring the loom, to Dilys Hooton and Agatha Lewis, of Tigh an Fhigheadair, Kilmory Knap, for its history, and to Marion Campbell of Kilberry for allowing me access to old diaries and records and for explaining the significance of the entries.

REFERENCES

1. The Diary of John Campbell of Kilberry, 1844-1908
2. Kilberry estate and farm cash accounts.
3. Marion Campbell of Kilberry: personal communication.
4. Knockbuy estate accounts.
5. An ell was 37 inches (Jamieson's Scots Dictionary.)

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CLAPPER BRIDGES: A FURTHER NOTE

The Clapper Bridge at Achnamara was described and illustrated in Kist 17, and Mr Murdo MacDonald the Archivist contributed a note to Kist 20 in which he suggested that such bridges were perhaps formerly not uncommon, citing two examples of 'slab bridges' in 1795 at Kilmartin and Slockavullin (Poltalloch Papers). We inspected the first of these and immediately dismissed its pretensions as the slabs lie across the deck of the bridge and not lengthwise as in a true 'clapper'. Such an arrangement is commonplace but so far as we are aware Achnamara is the sole true clapper bridge in our area. Only on a re-reading of Kist 20 after an interval of six years did we realise the extent to which readers could be misled by accepting 'slab bridge' and 'clapper bridge' as synonymous.

Presumably the term 'slab bridge' served to distinguish between it and the more conventional arched structure.

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THE LAND of KNAPDALE. WEST HIGHLAND SERIES No 13

The first impulse is to regard this publication as beneath serious notice, but on reflection it is realised that the multitude of mis-interpretations can mislead the casual reader who may have neither the local knowledge nor access to the published sources from which it has so freely drawn to enable him to form a critical estimate. But for anyone interested in Victorian-style purple prose this is a veritable mine of delight. The author appears to mistrust her powers of description in an anxiety to ensure complete understanding when ages and sizes of objects are mentioned - "ancient medieval quarries" "ancient Iron Age fortress" (one may wonder what a modern Iron Age fortress is)"small three foot stone", "tall eight foot stone".

In the compass of its 26 pages the booklet contains many statements which are fictitious, erroneous or otherwise misleading in various respects. Space is too valuable to be expended on a detailed list, desirable though that would be, and only a selection can be dealt with.

First of all every Grid Reference is wrong in at least one respect - all Scottish references start with N, not M (but charity suggests misprint rather than ignorance).

Page 5 Loch Crinan never occupied the area between Cairnbaan and Lochgilphead.
Page 6 Lochgilphead is recorded from the late 18th cent, scarcely "a long history dating back to medieval times". Sir John Orde was not a Jamaican planter, but married the heiress of one.
Page 7 The Robbers Den story is misinterpreted; McVicar lived near Brenfield as a youth; it was the MacIvers (not MacIvor) who came from Glassary.
Page 9 The road leaving "the main Tarbert highway" goes up Inverneil Glen, not down; were it otherwise it would be well below sea-level before it got far. Mining in the glen did not cease "around 1790"; it continued until at least 1881. Duncan Campbell perished on his way home from visiting the miners in that year.
Page 10 We are told that the hill Stuchd an Dhughaill (not Dughaill - the Gaelic is very shaky throughout) commemorated Duncan Campbell's death despite the fact that the O.S. had so named it eleven years earlier. The remains on Caisteal an Torr are not "extensive" but quite the reverse. Achahoish church is normal in size, not "tiny". The "flight of steps" in the cave at Cove is an old step-ladder left by excavators to facilitate egress.
Page 11 The "clearance" story is not substantiated.
Page 12 The date 1777 comes as a surprise - hitherto one of around 1493 had been accepted. On this page we have one of the most revealing of the blunders, a classic example of the danger of uncritical borrowing from earlier writings. The sketch of the Otter Stone on page 8 and description on page 12 do not refer to the genuine stone. In 'lifting' the information from P.S.A.S. vol XCV one of the very few errors made by Miss Campbell and Miss Sandeman is repeated, for it so happens that these two eminent authorities followed a false trail through heavy mist to the wrong stone, as subsequently realised. This will be corrected by them as opportunity offers, but its repetition here shows how little 'on the spot' investigation was carried out by our present author, for the correct stone higher up the hill is well known to all 'locals'.

In connection with this matter of quoting from earlier writers, those of us who recognise only too clearly the sources from which this publication has derived much of its substance deeply resent the totally irresponsible way

in which the ordinary usages of civilised authorship are flouted by making no attempt to give credit where it is due, though when mis-quotation is the rule, as here, the exploited authors are perhaps best left in anonymity.

Page 13 It would take too much space to correct the Castle Sween story as given, much though it needs it, but historians will be interested to know that Robert I did not, as always believed, die in 1329 but was active in attacking the castle in the 15th cent. News too that Eoghann Bacach (not "Eoghainn", which is genitive) was in fact a Graeme.

Page 15 There are no signs of a fort on Barnlongart and the term "Fort of the Longships" is not known locally; where Dr Cameron Gillies got it remains a mystery. In An Creachan we have another outstanding blunder, betraying not only lack of local knowledge but also deficient Gaelic, for it means simply The Cockleshell, and is a most apt description of ribbed rocks far up the glen and not near Loch an Torran; nor is the crannog "tiny".

Page 17 The MacMurachies were not displaced by MacMillans but by Campbells, c. 1590-1600. The astronomical significance of the Carse Stones is now gravely questioned.

Page 19 Tigh an Draighinn; another farrago, too complicated to put to rights here. Suffice it to state that the house was an inn and the woman was not "old" but young. We now know for the first time the location of Ard Delgon - few will agree with the identification.

Page 20 Why choose a long difficult route to Sliabh Ghaoil when there is a good Forestry/B.B.C. road from Meall Mor?

Page 22 "Fire Stone" is an invented name and the version of the Avinagillan tale is novel in producing a "cailleach".

The foregoing are only the more salient of the blunders and mis-statements, and space would not have been found for even these had it not seemed desirable to provide enough examples to arouse suspicions regarding the stability not only of this particular publication but also of the entire series.

Ending on a happier note, the maps are, on the whole, excellent, though the one on page 4 sends the traveller from Ardrishaig to Tarbert by the much longer Kilberry route.

F.S.Mackenna.

The Land of Knapdale: West Highland Series, No 13.
Mairi MacDonald, F.S.A.Scot £1.40.

The Fungus TUBER MACULATUM in a Mid-Argyll Garden

Anne M. Kahane

When preparing home-grown potatoes for dinner one evening in the autumn of 1980 my son pointed out that he had left a 'dud'. It was small and knobbly, whitish, and it floated - unlike the potatoes. I put it aside to have a better look later. Something about its appearance and smell called to mind edible truffles I had been shown in Central Italy, and the white ones I had eaten (in minute quantities) grated over risotto in the Vercelli area, so I set about finding out what my garden had produced.

Dr Eric Bignal, of the Nature Conservancy Council, sent the by then rather dried up lump to Dr R.Watling at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Edinburgh, who confirmed that this was indeed a fungus, related to the edible truffles of the Continent, and called Tuber maculatum. Until then they had no specimen in their Herbarium, and he was glad to have acquired one, but he really would like to receive another in better condition. This I was able to supply - I think in 1981 - and again, much to my surprise, in 1984 when there were four of them, three of which were very small. Quite unexpectedly also this year, 1985, another, of about thumbnail size, was dug up.

The bit of ground was part of the Poltalloch woods, but the larger trees near the house had been felled, probably in the 1960s, to allow more light into the garden. When I came here in the summer of 1973 the garden was pretty wild, and the part concerned had been used for a rubbish bonfire. Some time after I had removed bicycle wheels and other hard junk I decided to dig up a patch to grow vegetables in, roughly three by four metres running downhill from a fallen tree trunk which formed the edge of the cleared ground. The soil was raw, so in the course of time compost, seaweed, decayed cow-pats and wood-ash were incorporated into it, and crops of potatoes, peas, broad beans, jerusalem artichokes and spinach have been taken out. But, astonishingly, the mycelium of Tuber maculatum has survived all these alterations to its habitat and again produced a truffle this year. I think the conclusion must be that such growths are much commoner than has been realised - it is just a matter of chancing to recognise them.

BY THE WAY

Colin F. Fergusson

Ancient, beautiful carved stone crosses are well known in our area of Mid-Argyll and are always worthy of attention. Of lesser quality are crosses roughly hewn on rocks and boulders at various sites. All are well recorded by our historians.

Crosses of less durable material and of more recent date are also to be seen, with the added advantage that they often stand close to our main roads.

Travellers on the A816 Lochgilphead to Oban road during April and May are cheered on their way by a large cluster of daffodils and narcissi by the roadside just to the north of the village of Kilmartin. The bulbs, specially planted at this spot, have been there for many years, always increasing, for as we all know, these beautiful spring flowers have a pleasing knack of adding to their numbers with each succeeding season. Now their massed blooms attract the eye with their bright colour as the surrounding withered grass reluctantly gives way to the tender green shoots of a new crop.

Behind runs the Kilmartin Burn which has its source high in the hills overlooking Barbreck and Loch Craignish. After flowing through dark peat hags and tumbling over craggy rocks the burn enters Kilmartin Glen and flows quietly beside the road and onwards to end in Crinan Loch. From a placid stream in dry weather, it becomes a raging torrent as it races through the glen when heavy rain and gales sweep the district. With the water almost up to road level it is hard to distinguish between road and burn, especially at night. Barriers there may be at other dangerous parts, but there are none here to protect motorist or pedestrian.

Curious to know the reason for the flowers being here, one stops and finds a hand-printed notice on a small wooden cross PLEASE DO NOT PICK THE FLOWERS. THEY MARK THE SPOT WHERE AN OLD WOMAN OF THE TRAVELLING FOLK DROWNED.

Enquiry led to the reason for the cross and flowers being there. As the travelling folk made their way from place to place they had what were called 'pitches' where they could set up their simple tent of hazel sticks and tarpaulin. One such camp-site was near the junction of

the Ford and Oban roads. One winter night, the 19th January 1962 Clementine MacDonald, accompanied by one of her sons, left the camp to go to the nearby village of Kilmartin. After gathering a few 'bits o' things' for the tea from the villagers, and a dram at the inn, they made their way in the darkness to return to the camp. As is wont at times, even in the best of circles, mother and son had an argument, with the result that the son, who was a much stronger walker, went on ahead to let his mother plod homeward slowly. After an hour or two, when she had not arrived, anxiety arose as to her safety. Contact was made with the Kilmartin policeman (at that time the late Archibald MacDonald) resulting in the discovery of Clementine's body in the part of Kilmartin Burn knaow as Skeodnish. Drowning was given as the cause of death and the remains of Clementine MacDonald were later interred in Achnabreck Cemetery near Lochgilphead. The radiant colours of the spring flowers and the simple cross, carefully tended by local paople, remind us of a sad event which took place at this rural spot. PLEASE DO NOT PICK THE FLOWERS.

Another wayside cross is to be seen between Port Ann and Lochgair on the A83. It lies mid-way between the two places on the left-hand side if going towards Inveraray. The site is now well marked with a rowan and hawthorn intermingling their branches and growing to a height of 15 to 18 feet. Whether or not they were planted deliberately is a matter for conjecture. At the base of the trees is a wooden cross 3 feet high, with 2-foot arms. At the intersection of upright and arms is a small bronze plaque recording simply CHARLES TOWNSLEY 28th NOVEMBER 1914. One of the travelling people in our area, he was a noted piper and enlisted in the 1/8 Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders which was then under the command of Lt.Col. John Campbell of Kilberry.

These wooden crosses were returned to next-of-kin if they wanted them, after the War Graves Commission had erected permanent head-stones in Flanders and other war cemeteries throughout war-torn countries.

At one time the patch of bare earth around the cross was covered with trinkets such as shells, buttons (especially from military uniforms), pence and half-pence of the old coinage. Today decimal coins of one, two, five and

ten pence take their place on the arms of the cross, eventually to fall to the ground as others are added.

Why the cross was set up here is unknown, as the area around was not recognised as a camp site of travelling folk. Probably it was carried about by them until it was felt that it should remain in a permanent place. However one thing is certain; the cross has recently been repaired and securely tied to a small metal stake. The repair and the fact that coins and trinkets continue to accumulate, testifies to regular visits of the travelling people as they journey on the road.

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An Outstanding Adventure Book. Although Jim Andrews' TWELVE SHIPS A-SAILING is sub-titled 'Thirty five years of home water cruising' it would be a grave mistake to assume that it is only of interest to sailing folk, for it is an enthralling adventure story set in the west coast of Scotland, the east and south of England, the Irish Sea and Ulster, with a diverting episode in Norway. This reviewer found it almost impossible to lay aside until the final page, and then immediately began a re-reading. Our former member has surpassed himself in the vivid and absorbing prose of this book and one is left with the feeling of having shared in the pleasures and anxieties of a remarkably delightful family. A major contribution to this impact is made by the forty-one superb and highly professional drawings illustrating scenes and episodes in the text; they are a delight to study and contrive to put the sixteen photographs into second place (with the exception of the evocative and amusing "Where the heck'll I stow the cornflakes?").

Yet despite all these literary and pictorial allurements, the book amply fulfils its fundamental purpose of passing on the accumulated riches of the author's long and varied experience of small-boat sailing, and on almost every page the enquiring reader will find something to enhance his own knowledge and stimulate his interest. In these two factors, of utterly absorbing narrative and sound technical advice, lie the outstanding achievement of this book.

TWELVE SHIPS A-SAILING. Jim Andrews.
Published by David & Charles. £10.95