

## BEEKEEPING IN EARLY 19thC MULL

A donation from the estate of Dr. Bill Clegg has included the material that he was gathering for a history of the Mull doctors and prompted a look at other information that the archives hold about former doctors in Mull, particularly about their interests. Like Bill Clegg, Mull doctors, have always had other interests. One of the earliest about whom we have any information was Hector McColl and Sheila Barnard (over page) has done some fascinating detective work on his beekeeping.



Skep in  
beehole,  
Heligan

## CURATOR

Recent acquisitions all seem to include items of clothing, of a more or less formal nature.

Firstly, we have been given a complete naval officer's uniform. Next, Dougie MacNeilage has presented us with Alec Yule's Masonic regalia, with sash, apron, etc., as well as a photo we did not have in the archive.

Finally we have the cloak and tiara worn way back by the Salen Show Queen. Does anyone have a photo of this being worn?

Apart from a general tidy up of the exhibits over the winter, it is hoped to introduce one new display. An exhibit of the Ritchies' Iona crafts has been suggested- this could replace the display of lighting in the showcase. Alternative suggestions welcomed!

As you may know, Jean Whittaker has decided it is time to hand over the post of Archivist to a successor. I would like to thank her sincerely for the huge amount of hard work she has put in to the Museum over many years.

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL - due in April each year

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## TALKING TO OUR VISITORS

The most interesting part of the Museum day is time spent at the desk talking to our many visitors. The most frequent questions are still "Where are the public toilets?" and "Tell me about the coloured buildings" but every topic under the sun gets discussed, and questions asked and answered.

Sometimes we are communicating by sign language as with the Chinese visitor (with no English) who excitedly dragged Dougie over to the pictures of Isabella Bird in China on "his" river, or the Japanese man (no English) who picked up the postcard with *An t-eilean Muileach* and began singing the tune - even if he couldn't read the words, he could read the music.

Then there were excited teenagers who had discovered the Museum was a site for "Pokemon Go" (get a teenager to explain this to you!).

In June, Ian P. was on duty and towards the end of the session a party of visitors entered. Ian enquired, as we often do, where they were from. A not uncommon reply was given "you will never of heard of it". Ian said "well ok. Try me". They were right he had never heard of Waipu on the North Island of New Zealand. He was told that Waipu was a very Scottish area of New Zealand with their own Highland Games having been settled by a Rev Norman McLeod and his followers who originated from the Ullapool area of north west Scotland. This was a migration story with a difference in that the Rev McLeod first took his followers to Pictou, Nova Scotia but they did not stay very long before moving to St. Ann's, Cape Breton Island. There they experienced cold winters, potato blight, etc. and so, hearing that it was better in Australia, set sail for Adelaide, South Australia. No suitable ground was found there so the "Normanites" as they were to be called set sail again making landfall at Auckland, New Zealand from where they went to Waipu. Only two days later Ian was on the desk again, when another party from New Zealand came in. Again Ian asked where in New Zealand they were from. "Ah you will have never heard of it" was the reply. Again his usual response "ok. Try me". "Waipu" was the reply. You should have seen the faces when he asked "Are you Normanites?". "Yes" was the reply. Ian then recalled the journey that the Rev McLeod and his followers had made to get to Waipu. "How do you know all this?" they asked. Ian then told them about the Saturday visitors who had told him the story. Now what are the chances of two parties from Waipu visiting the Museum within 48 hours of each other and neither party knowing about the other. Population of Waipu: 1,406 at the 2006 census.

We are kept busy all summer with visitors off cruise liners, and we have a list of the expected ships with dates and times, and number of passengers (the Magellan has 1800 on board). However in August the cruise liner Saga Sapphire came in for an unplanned visit due to change of itinerary. On board was a retired seaman who had been in Tobermory on the HMT Fusilier in May 1943. He found the visit quite emotional as he never expected to be back here again, ever. Finding the list of naval ships and our special visitors book reserved for those with wartime connections with Tobermory, was such a pleasure for him, as well as sadly recalling comrades who had not survived.

We try to help everyone enjoy their visit, help them to plan how they will explore other parts of Mull and understand our history. But of course there's no pleasing everyone "I think Braveheart brings history to life better than this!" was recently overheard as some visitors left.

*New attending members are always welcome - come and join the team and maybe you'll have a unique story for the next newsletter.*

# Archive and Library Report

## MULL DOCTORS

### *Dr Hector McColl, Surgeon and Beekeeper*

Archives are full of surprises. In the 'Medical' box was a treatment book belonging to Dr Hector McColl which had been re-used to record rents, purchases of potatoes ... and bees. The beekeeping entries in the treatment book begin when he was 50 living at Portmore, Tobermory, with 7 stocks of bees in 1853.

Although 'modern' beehives with movable frames allowing inspection of bees had been invented (Langstroth having patented his design in 1852), Dr McColl was keeping his bees in skeps in the time-honoured fashion. Every May he noted how many colonies had survived the winter and he recorded the dates and origin of the summer swarms. Entry for 22 June 1855 reads, 'By 1 swarm of stock next gate'. 5 July: 'By 1 swarm of 3rd stock from gate'. 9 July: 'By 1 swarm of the upper stock. Old mother'.



In late September he would smoke up to 4 colonies, presumably to take the honey. This was not the gentle smoke used by modern beekeepers when inspecting bees but something a tad more lethal, eg sulphur. The remaining (strongest) colonies would over-winter on their own honey stores, built up during the year. Reading between the lines, it appears his swarms didn't travel far. In 1857 a swarm 'entered the hive that died in winter'. The fact that he commented on one that went further, on 13 July 1854, seems to confirm this: 'swarm found at Tengymenach by shepherds' – though this could have been a swarm from someone else's bees!

So, are the descendents of his bees still living in Tobermory? I think it unlikely. In 1918/19 the bees at Gruline died of Isle of Wight disease (Acarine) and it's entirely possible that this would have been a problem in Tobermory as it's still around today. Beekeepers all over Scotland replaced their dead native 'black bees' (*Apis mellifera mellifera*) with Italian imports and subsequent beekeepers in Tobermory have kept other types. It would be very interesting to hear about bees kept elsewhere on Mull and Iona in years gone by, and maybe scope for a longer article. Perhaps we may even discover 'bee boles' built into garden walls. Time for more detective work!  
*Sheila Barnard, Mull & Iona BKA*

At the other end of the century we have Dr Maxwell, a man of many interests and many enterprises. He was a sergeant



in the Argyll volunteers and another interest was bottled water. The Museum has a couple of glass bottles embossed with the legend *Mull and Iona Aerated Water Company*, the enterprise that he founded and ran from Barra Cottage in Tobermory. A recent visitor to the Museum discovered these bottles on a high shelf and, having an interest in aerated water, took one down and enquired. We were unable to supply much about the company, but he was able to tell us that bottled water was fashionable at the turn of the 20th century because of its supposed therapeutic properties. Nothing, it seems changes, even when it now comes in plastic bottles.

The past doctor who is most fresh in our minds, of course, is Bill Clegg with his keen interest in botany and photography and his passion for climbing hills.



*Bill Clegg combining his passion for photography and botany*

Jo Weston has enthusiastically taken over the material that Bill left for his history of Mull doctors amongst which is a quantity of photocopied excerpts from the Minutes of the Kilninian and Kilmore Parochial Board which she is transcribing

## RECENT ACQUISITIONS

The Archives have recently acquired that most valuable of acquisitions: people. Recently "acquired" have been Morar Honeyman, Andrena Duffin, Dylan Cobban and Jo Weston. All these have set to work on a backlog of projects that have been accumulating in the Museum Archives. Jo has been sorting and transcribing the deposit that came from the estate of Bill Clegg, in particular that the material that he accumulated for his proposed history of the doctors of Mull. Morar has been scanning 5 albums of photographs that are on loan from Rona Baker. These contain a pictorial record of the Allan and Normand families and Andrena, who knew them well when growing up in Mull is identifying the various people and places and giving much background anecdotal information. Dylan, with his passion for history, has asked to volunteer in the Museum as part of the requirements for his Duke of Edinburgh Silver award

## LIBRARY

### RECENT ACQUISITIONS

The Ross of Mull Heritage Centre has generously donated a copy of "John Keats in Mull" by J. Stewart Cameron to the Museum. The beautifully presented and illustrated booklet chronicles Keats' visit and his journeys through the old tracks of Mull and the rowing boat ferries used on his route and complements the material that the Mull has pertaining to Keats' visit. It sets Keats' visit in its historical context, his health context and the poor weather of that time due to the slow end to the mini ice-age and the massive volcanic eruption of "Tambora" in the East Indies. The resultant ash clouds reduced light levels, sunshine and temperatures worldwide to such an extent that poor harvests were recorded and starvation was widespread. The booklet suggests that such circumstances may have had an effect Keats' already poor health and accelerated his untimely death at the early age of 25.

## WRITTEN GAELIC

At the Annual Joint Supper of the Mull Historical Society and the Mull Museum on 18<sup>th</sup> November, where Jo Currie gave a talk on the publication of a new book on Hector MacLean of Nova Scotia, there was some discussion on the earliest use of Gaelic as a written language. The Library assistants at the Museum regularly receive a schedule of Antiquarian, Fine and Rare books held currently by Larry Hutchison and the recent issue of his schedule contained inserting comment of the very subject. His precis notes on "The book of Deer 2 edited by John Stuart, comment that the manuscript probably dates from the 9<sup>th</sup> century and derives its name from the 6<sup>th</sup> century Celtic monastic foundation of Deer, Aberdeen shire, Mainly written in Latin . . . "Its importance rests on the Gaelic notes written in the margins and blank spaces, thought to have been inserted between 1131 and 1153, these notitiae represent the earliest surviving examples of continuous Gaelic prose found in Scottish manuscripts with references to kings, abbots and local landowners as well as useful early evidence of place-names"