

# THE SCOTS CANADIAN

Issue XXIX

Newsletter of the Scottish Studies Society: ISSN No. 1491-2759

Winter 2008-09

## Canada/UK movie "Stone of Destiny" to premier in 2009

Producer Rob Merilees of Vancouver's Infinity Features and director Charles Martin Smith completed the Canada/U.K. co-production of *Stone of Destiny* in Glasgow and London on last August. It is their second feature collaboration, following 2003's acclaimed *The Snow Walker*.

The \$13-million adventure/comedy, based on the Ian Hamilton book *The Taking of the Stone of Destiny*, follows the true story of four Scottish students who plan to break into London's Westminster Abbey and retrieve the ancient Stone of Scone as a gesture of defiance to British rule.

It stars Robert Carlyle (*Angela's Ashes*, *Trainspotting*), Billy Boyd (*The Lord of the Rings*), Kate Mara (*Shooter*) and Charlie Cox (*Stardust*). Merilees produces with Andrew Boswell of London-based The Mob Film Company.

The 30-day shooting schedule included two days in London's famed Westminster Abbey, while the rest of the shoot took place in and around Glasgow, with locations including the University of Glasgow and the historic Arbroath Abbey.

*Stone of Destiny* is the first feature to shoot inside Westminster Abbey in 50 years. "It was challenging," Merilees recalls. "It's a

location of such historic significance that we had to be very careful and respectful of it. We also had to double two different Scottish abbeys for Westminster, and match it when we were actually there."

"It's a bit of a tough transition...In Scotland they shoot 10-hour days, while Canadian crews are used to 12-hour days," he says.

Post-production was completed at Infinity, Technicolor and DBC Sound in Vancouver, and the movie will be released in Canada next year.

As political debate in this and other countries continues to involve the tricky business of national pride, this fun-loving film reminds us that a sense of humour can sometimes help navigate these complex waters. Filmmaker Charles Martin Smith, creator of the Farley Mowatt adaptation *The Snow Walker*, is fascinated by national myths. Here, he looks across the pond for inspiration, finding a fast-paced and fascinating true story about an extraordinary caper, a rising nationalist tide and a crucial symbol of Scottish independence. It happened in 1950, when a couple of Scottish friends took it upon themselves to steal back a symbol of their people. But it all began centuries earlier.

In 1296, England's Edward I claimed Scotland's Stone of Scone as part of his spoils of war, and took the three-hundred-pound block of sandstone to Westminster Abbey. It remained there for centuries as part of St. Edward's Chair, upon which English monarchs were crowned – a not particularly subtle symbol of England's rule over Scotland. That is, it remained there until Christmas Day 1950, when a group of Scottish students set out to reclaim the stone from the Abbey.



The cast of "Stone of Destiny" celebrates the stone's return to Scotland with a wee dram. The movie is based on Ian Hamilton's book "The Taking of the Stone of Destiny" and as Ian is planning a visit to Canada early in 2009, the Foundation is hoping to sponsor a talk by him. Please check our website for details.

*Stone of Destiny* recreates this historic heist with humorous charm and a universal sense of patriotism. Ian Hamilton (Charlie Cox) hopes to enflame some national pride among his fellow students, and the Stone is his answer. His infectious enthusiasm persuades several friends, including Kay (Kate Mara), Alan (Ciaron Kelly), Gavin (Stephen McCole) and Bill (Billy Boyd), to help. Hamilton's zeal even manages to convince prominent Scottish nationalist John MacCormick (Robert Carlyle) to assist with the scheme.

As an adventure comedy that is as funny as it is hair-raising, *Stone of Destiny* provokes cheers. The heist itself is recreated in thrilling detail, as the would-be thieves bumble their way into Westminster Abbey, trying to shake the foundations of English power by amateur means. The bright young cast is rounded out by the legendary Brenda Fricker as a motherly and wise housekeeper and Peter Mullan as Ian's father. Smith's light touch lends the theme of independence, both personal and political, an easy resonance that transcends nationality. *Stone of Destiny* is about the love of country and self, about the symbols that connect a culture, and about how a nation's independence could be defined by a chunk of rock.



Robert Burns by Calum Colvin, from "Ossian – Fragments of Ancient Poetry" an exhibition of digital photography by Calum Colvin. The exhibition took place last September/October at the University of Guelph (see page 2).

# Centering Scotland in Canada

Professor Graeme Morton, Scottish Studies Foundation Chair at the University of Guelph, provides us with a retrospective of activities in 2008.

Harving back to my student days, I am reminded that much of what we do is seasonal work. Just like those summer jobs that helped fund my studies (although for students today such work, and such costs, are year long commitments), our activities come in cycles. At the start of every year it is the season for hunting the haggis. I managed to involve myself in five Burns Suppers in six days last January, speaking in all but one (Gordon Hepburn wisely saw a man in need of a rest and a dram at the Granite Club). One of those Suppers is a Centre for Scottish Studies affair in conjunction with St James the Apostle Church in Guelph, with our students performing all the roles with a mixture of Scottish, Canadian and American accents (although the piping by Erin Grant lilt in a singular Scottish way.) We also involved ourselves with Guelph Civic Museum to promote our activities and those of the Foundation.

In February the University of Guelph's College of Management and Economics conferred an Honorary Degree (Doctor of Letters) on The Honourable Alastair Gillespie, P.C, O.C, a former Scot of the Year (2003). Dr Gillespie has been a wonderful supporter of the Scottish Studies Foundation and a source of sound advice for all that we do.

March saw me make my first visit to New Zealand to give a keynote lecture at the Scotland in the Diaspora conference organised by the Irish-Scottish Studies Centre at the Victoria University of Wellington, with Dr Brad Patterson being a most welcoming host.

April, of course, is another Scottish season as Tartan Day extended into "Tartan Week" or for some "Scotland Week" (depending on your accent.) Teaming up the Foundation and Scottish Development International, the 2008 Scot of the Year event was one of the most successful ever, with Donald Stewart, CEO of Sun Life Financial, a worthy recipient. The event was attended by Linda Fabiani, MSP, Minister for External Affairs, Europe and Culture who presented the award to Mr. Stewart. The next morning she made her first visit to the Centre for Scottish Studies. I had lost my voice in the recycled air of the long haul flight back from New Zealand, exacerbated by the night's festivities at the CN Tower. So it was to great

bemusement to some, and hilarity to others, as I croaked my welcome to the Minister and introduced her to our senior team, faculty and students. It was a positive visit that included an opportunity for us to sit down with the Minister and her staff to discuss our role and those of others in the Scottish-Canadian community in promoting Scotland throughout the Diaspora.

To cap off a busy three days, and as part of our contribution to the week of activities, we held the 2008 Scottish Studies Spring Colloquium in Knox College in Toronto on Saturday 5th April. It was an opportunity to launch the University of Guelph's federally funded project to digitize a five percent sample of the 1871 censuses for Scotland and Canada (<http://www.census1871.ca>). We also launched the on-line version of the *International Review of Scottish Studies*. It is now possible to visit the journal electronically right back to its days as *Scottish Tradition* and its origins as the *Proceedings of the Scottish Studies Colloquium in 1968*. You can access these on the web at <http://www.irss.uoguelph.ca>.

In May we organised a one-off conference in Guelph on Scottish medieval and environmental history based around three guest speakers from Stirling University.

In June we organised another conference, *Scottish Associational Culture in the Diaspora*, held in Toronto. We brought together a number of scholars from around the world who are working on St Andrew's, Burns, Caledonian and other Scottish societies. We were delighted with the lineup and look forward to the publication of the papers, plus others added in from the likes of Marjory Harper, Angela McCarthy and Karly Kehoe, set to appear in April 2009. The event also hosted the AGM of the Scottish Studies Foundation, and what a great turnout was achieved.

August was Fergus Highland Games, and rain (and some more!). Indeed it was wet, very wet throughout the Games season. For some reason the absence of sun led to us selling more Centre for Scottish Studies T-shirts and hats than ever before; clearly the Scots are funny folk. The next day I spoke at the Kirkin of the Tartan in Stratford, my first such event. But then a second came along as the Centre for Scottish Studies was Kirk'd as civic leaders in John Galt's old parish church in Guelph.

September saw the start of term and the Scottish Studies Fall Colloquium, this year celebrating its 40th anniversary. We decided to blow the budget and celebrate in style, most notably with the *Ossian – Fragments of Ancient Poetry* art exhibition of digital photography by Calum Colvin. The exhibition had previously been shown in Paris, Brussels and the Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh. It came to Guelph with

sponsorship from the Scottish government for which we are so very most grateful, especially to Minister Linda Fabiani. The exhibition was simply stunning and we housed it the main university library in one of the most public spots on campus, to be seen by thousands. We launched it with a party, with talks by University of Guelph President Alastair Summerlee, Scottish Development International Senior VP Michael Corish, yours truly and of course the artist himself Calum Colvin (whose flight, and that of his partner, were covered by the sponsorship of Air Transat – thanks!).

Calum also opened the 40th Anniversary Colloquium the next morning with an extended talk surrounded by his exhibition. We then moved location to Rozanski Hall to hear sparkling talks by Kim Sullivan (Otago), on St Andrew's Societies in New Zealand and Australia, Dr Tom Normand (St Andrews) on modern Scottish art, and Scotland's Registrar General Duncan MacNiven on his role as keeper of the records of Births, Deaths and Marriages and the development of Scotland's People for genealogical research. The day concluded with Prof Cairns Craig's presentation of the 2nd Jill McKenzie Memorial Lecture on the relationship between literature and science in 19th-century Scotland. Even without the much promised birthday cake, a victim of an "icing malfunction," it truly was the highest quality Colloquium in recent memory. And talking of memory, we were grateful to Dr Elizabeth Waterston, organiser of the first Colloquium in 1968, to be on hand to tell us how it all began.

History was also on show at the Toronto International Film Festival in September, with the wonderful new film telling the tale of the "theft" of the Stone of Destiny in 1950. Andrew Hinson from the Scottish Studies Office was on the red carpet, as well as the post screening party, and we look forward to the film's formal release in Canada next February as well as, it is hoped, a public lecture in Toronto by the main man fifty-eight years ago now, Ian Hamilton.

November leads us into St Andrew's Day, and I am delighted to be representing the Centre for Scottish Studies and the Foundation as I visit Vancouver to present the annual St Andrew's and Caledonian Lecture at Simon Fraser University. It is a great honour and I am grateful to Dr Leith Davis, Director of the Centre of Scottish Studies at SFU for inviting me.

And what's next? Well, the Burns supper season of course – so I hope to see you at the Granite Club!

# *There was a Lad was born in Kyle*

Fred G. Sykes tells the story behind the song

Just over 250 years ago William Burnes from Dunnottar was engaged by Dr. William Fergusson as gardener on his small estate of Doonholm at Alloway. Here Burnes skilfully laid out gardens and walks beside the banks of “Bonnie Doon,” and working hard and living frugally he was eventually able to save sufficient to feu seven acres of ground front the Rozelle estate.

This plot he cultivated as a market garden and on it, with his own hands, he built a simple “but and ben” cottage with a stable and byre, all roofed with thatch. It says much for his workmanship that there was no need to completely rethatch it for 200 years.

The cottage became their first home when William Burnes married Agnes Brown in 1757. Thirteen months later Robert Burns, destined to become Scotland's best-known poet, was born. Later, he himself was to tell of his birth in song “There was a Lad was bom in Kyle” sung to the old air “O gin ye were deid guid man.” One verse neatly recording his birth date:

*Our monarch's hindmost year but ane  
Was five-and-twenty days begun,  
'Twas then a blast of Januar' win'  
Blew hansel in on Robin.*

The story goes that when Robert was about to be born his father went for assistance, and at the ford over the Curtecan Burn found a gypsy woman frightened to cross. He courteously helped her over the water, and later found her by his wife's bedside in the cottage, ready to “spae” the baby's fortune:

*The gossip keekit in his loof,  
Quo' she, Wha lives will see the proof.  
This waly boy will be nae coof;  
I think we'll ca' him Robin.*

For eight years the Burnes's lived in the cottage at Alloway, the father working by day at Doonholm, and in his own ground during the evening. Now, with four children, more room was needed and William got the lease of a small farm Mount Oliphant.

For a while he continued to own the cottage, but sold it to the Incorporation of Shoemakers in Ayr in 1781; thereafter it was a public house for nearly a century before being acquired by the trustees of the Burns Monument.

At Mount Oliphant the daily round was one of unceasing toil on a poor farm; and

after a little schooling from various sources and from his father, young Robert began the pattern of back-breaking work by day, and study and writing by night that was to last his lifetime.

His moves from farm to farm, each one of poor ground; his consequent unending fight against poverty; the flowering of his genius; his travels, his marriage, duty as an excise officer, and early death at Dumfries form a story told with unending variations through the years and annually on the anniversary of his birth, January 25, is to many Scots, both home and overseas, a serious rival to Hogmanay itself as an occasion for celebration, and every January thousands of speakers toast “The Immortal Memory.”

His many loves and his own sweet songs that have immortalised them need no recounting; his hunger for beauty and romance was, after all, part of the man. His industry none can deny, and he left such a wealth of songs, epistles and poems that the name of the Lad born in Kyle will endure for all time.

Kyle, incidentally, is one of the three districts into which the pleasant county of Ayrshire is divided. Its boundaries are the River Irvine to the north, beyond which is the district of Cunningham, and the Doon valley to the south, beyond which is Carrick.

Let us take a closer look at the Alloway in which he was born and as it remembers him now.

There is no better description of the area in Burns time than in his thrillingly colourful story of Tam o' Shanter, who drank too deeply in an Ayr tavern before setting out for home on a wild night of storm.

Between High Street and the Doon there was no highway as we know it now, and through a waste of scrub he came to the flooded Curtecan, now the Slaphouse Burn which crosses Belleisle golf course.

Then riding over moorland he came to the cairn where hunters “fand the murdered bairn,” and it is interesting to note that this, marked by a tree, can still be seen in a housing estate at Cambusdoon.

Passing Mungo's Well, Tam reached the Auld Kirk, where he saw the dancing witches and Auld Nick and, disturbing their capers with a shout, was chased to the bridge, the only one then which crossed the Doon. Here his mount Maggie lost most of her tail.

When the new bridge over the Doon was built in 1813 the Road Trustees decided to demolish the Auld Brig, but fortunately



*The birthplace of Robert Burns*

Burns admirers secured its reprieve and now its humpbacked form, roughly cobbled, is a constant and picturesque attraction.

Now Alloway is being engulfed by new housing schemes and soon will no longer be distinguishable as a village. But still there remain the landmarks of Burns time, and yearly they draw thousands of visitors from all over the world.

The cottage, restored as Burns knew it, but now with an adjacent museum and pleasant gardens; the Auld Kirk, where his father is buried, and the Auld Brig. The nine Corinthian pillars of the monument commemorating the poet stand high above the Doon.

In 1844, at a grand Burns Festival held at the latter site, Lord Eglinton said, “Here, on the very spot where he first drew breath on the very ground which his genius has hallowed, beside the Auld Kirk of Alloway which his verse has immortalised, beneath the monument which an admiring and repentant people have raised to him, we meet, after the lapse of years, to pay homage to the Man of Genius.” Truly a justification of the words of the poet's own song:

*He'll hae misfortunes great and sma,  
But aye a heart aboon them a',  
He'll be a credit till us a'*

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## Trollope's visit to St. Kilda

*This description by renowned Victorian author Anthony Trollope first appeared in 1878 in a privately printed volume entitled "How the 'Mastiff' Went to Iceland" which was commissioned by Sir John Burns, first Baron of Inverclyde. The Mastiff was a vessel of 870 tons built for the "Scotch and Irish Royal Mail Service" and at the time was owned by Sir John and his partner. The chronicle is noteworthy for Trollope's foretelling that some day the island might be evacuated, an event which actually took place in 1930 when all residents sadly but voluntarily left for the Scottish mainland in 1930. The island remained uninhabited until a radar station was built in 1957 and is now under the protection of the National Trust for Scotland.*

Nothing can be more picturesque than the approach to St. Kilda, seen as it was by us through the rising fog. We came upon the jutting rocks of the point suddenly, as it were, to us who were uninitiated in such matters. The captains and the mariners, no doubt, knew more about it, having felt their way gradually through the darkened water. As we glided into the little bay by which the island is approached, we saw arches in the rocks, through which the blue sea could be again seen, and the abodes of myriads of birds, which were disturbed by our steam whistle, and the sharp, serrated points of jagged cliff, all so near us that every detail was clear to our eyes. Then, by degrees, we came upon the little green valley opening down upon the shore in which the people of St. Kilda live. There were the few acres that are cultivated in the island, and there is the row of cottages, eighteen in number, in which the inhabitants live. There is also the chapel which has been built for their use, and there also lives their pastor, who has been now twelve years among them. We went ashore in the ship's boats, and the inhabitants came out to meet us with gracious smiles. With them was their minister, and with them also was Miss MacLeod, the sister of MacLeod, the proprietor of the island, - of whose goodness in going among them and remaining with them from time to time it is impossible to speak in terms of too high praise. Charity can hardly go beyond this, seeing that every hour of her presence is to them a blessing, and that every hour of her presence there must be to her an exile.

The first care was to land certain stores, - tea, sugar, and such like, - which Mr. Burns had brought as a present to the people. It is the necessity of their position that such aid should be essential almost to their existence. Then we walked up among the cottages, buying woollen stockings and sea-birds' eggs, such being the commodities they had for sale. Some coarse cloth we found there also, made on the island from the wool grown there, of which some among us bought sufficient for a coat, waistcoat, or petticoat, as the case may be.

They are a comely, good-looking people, bearing no outward signs of want. So much I am bound to say on their behalf. But their general condition is such as to have made me at least lament that so small an island, so far removed from the comforts of the mainland, should have become the abode of a few families. It is about forty-five miles from the nearest of the large inhabited islands, - forty-five miles, that is, from humanity; but St. Kilda is in itself so small that there is no ready mode for traversing that distance. There is no communication by steamer, except such a chance coming as that of ours. The whole wealth of the small community cannot command more than a small rowing-boat or two. When we landed, the men were in sore distress for a few fathoms of rope, which they obtained from the liberality of Mr. Burns. It was thus apparent that they were excluded from the world, as so many Robinson Crusoes; and though the life of a Robinson Crusoe, or a few Robinson Crusoes, may be very picturesque, humanity will always desire to restore a Robinson Crusoe back to the community of the world.

The island is about two-and-a-half miles long, and about seven in circumference; the highest land is about 1,200 feet high. As I have stated before, it contains about thirty acres of cultivated land, lying just in front of the cottages, on which potatoes and oats are grown. But it appeared, even in regard to this land, that it cannot return more than three to one for the seed committed to the earth. Within the memory of some of the

inhabitants the returns were nearly treble what they are now. When the labour is counted up, the value of the land, and the difficulty of carrying seed to such a place, - the produce of the place itself deteriorating too quickly for purposes of procreation, - it becomes a question whether any such cultivation can become remunerative. There is, too, a considerable amount of pasture-land among the rocks and hills, on which are maintained about fifty cattle and 400 sheep; but with them there is much difficulty. The winter here is very cold, and in winter the stock is necessarily left to shift for themselves.

If there are to be inhabitants in St. Kilda it is of course well that they should have mutton, wool, and milk; but still there arises the question whether the industry and attention needed for the care of the sheep and oxen might not be expended elsewhere more profitably, and with greater advantage to the persons concerned.

In their want of other fuel, the inhabitants skin the turf from their pastures and burn it. Gradually, thus, the grass is going, for it is burned much quicker than it is produced. In this way the food for the sheep and cattle will quickly disappear.

Of the cottages it must be acknowledged that they are much better in outward appearance than many which are to be seen on the mainland, either in the Highlands or in Ireland, or even, I may add, than in parts of England. They are soundly built of stone, and each contains two well-sized rooms; but it may, I think, be taken for granted that this is due to private munificence and not to the personal efforts of the inhabitants. There are still to be seen the wretched hovels in which the people dwelt before the stone cottages were erected, fifteen years ago. The interior of these habitations could hardly be called clean; but could it be expected that they should be so? Cleanliness is one of those advantages of civilization which come from the frequent communication of men with men. Robinson Crusoe could hardly have been particular about his bed; and though in



*The St. Kilda "Parliament" prior to evacuation*

fiction many comforts have been attributed to him, the thoughtful reader, reading between the lines, will have recognized his many deficiencies. Those cottages, which I suspect to have been the result of private munificence, by which I mean that they have been built at an expense of money for which no adequate return was expected when they were built, are rented indeed at £2 per annum each; but the rent so paid includes the use of the cultivated land. In addition to this, nine pence a year is paid for a sheep's grazing, and some adjusted annual stipend, - I heard, but I forget what, - for a cow or an ox. But I heard also that the whole rental of the island is about £80 per annum, much more than which, if the things could be put at their proper value, is given back in charity.

The pastor, whose life here is certainly not to be envied, and who acts as schoolmaster as well as minister, receives £80 per annum from the Scotch Free Church. That also is to be counted among the charities bestowed upon the island, and is bestowed at the cost of great necessary deterioration in the energy and intellectual capacity of the clergyman selected for the purpose. That it should be otherwise is impossible. There is but one person in the island, but himself, a married woman, who can speak a word of English. No books can reach him; hardly a newspaper. To him can come none of that light which we all receive from intellectual conversation. Surely £80 on the mainland would go much farther, both for the good of the minister and for that of those receiving his ministrations. We were told that some former MacLeod had bought the island for some round sum, - and as I have seen £3,000 mentioned in a published work as that given, I may repeat the figure. In return for this, he has upon his shoulders and on those of his sister, the onerous task of sustaining by his private means the existence of the community and of relieving their wants. As for the £80, we may say that it goes a very short way in reimbursing him. It is good to find a man who will do this, but it is not good to have a state of things in which such doing is necessary.

There are between seventy and eighty inhabitants on the island, of whom, among the adults, the female outnumber the male by nearly two to one. This, of course, comes from the fact that the young men can leave the harshness of such a life much more easily than the young women. I was told that at the present moment there were two marriageable young men at St. Kilda, and twelve marriageable, but unmarried, females. Nothing can be more detrimental to a community than such a state of things, unless it be the constant intermarrying of near relations, which must be the result of a few families living together in seclusion from the world at large. As far as I could learn, there

were six family names among the eighteen families resident at St. Kilda. The names were as follows: - McDonald, McCrinnen, McKinnon, McQueen, Gillies, and Ferguson. I found that they could all read, and were plentifully supplied with bibles in Gaelic. That they are a very religious people there can be no doubt, - though probably in some things their religion may run towards superstition, as must be the case in so small a community. I have said that outwardly they appeared to be a healthy and comely race. In mechanical things they certainly are clever, making very many things for themselves which the economical division of labour throws into the hands of a few in large cities. Each man is his own shoemaker and tailor. They dye their own wool. Whatever furniture they use they make generally for themselves. They make their own candles. But perhaps the chief employment of the men is the catching of sea birds; the feathers of which they sell, and on the flesh of which they in a great part live. The bird which they eat is the fulmar. What might be the nature of its flesh to one uninitiated I had no means of testing during the few hours we spent upon the island. But in conversation with the English-speaking female inhabitant, - a Mrs. McDonald, who had been born in Sutherlandshire, and had spent there the early years of her life, - I learned that she had not very readily fallen into the way of eating the fulmar. A little bit of a very young bird even yet went a very long way with her. Sometimes they have bread. Sometimes they make a stew with oatmeal and fulmar, - not delicious I should think to any but a St. Kildarite; - sometimes they luxuriate with corned mutton. Sometimes they have porridge. Occasionally they have been near to famine; and then they have been kept alive by presents, - by what we may call eleemosynary aid. A former visitor, giving an account of his visit, states that he found twenty carcasses of cured mutton lying in a warehouse. But he goes on to say that that mutton had been brought from another island by the proprietor, and that they were his property. This transaction was no doubt comfortable to the island; but I doubt whether it redounded to the profit of the owner of the mutton.

I have said that the St. Kildarites appeared to be healthy. From a medical report, however, published by the same traveller, Mr. MacDiarmid, it appears that they are greatly troubled with rheumatism and scrofula. But the curse of the island in regard to its sanitary condition is a disease among babies for which the cause has not yet been discovered. At about eight days old the children die. That this was so I heard from every side. It seemed to prevail to such an extent that a child at that age would be more likely to die than live. Such is St. Kilda; -a

most picturesque point in the ocean at which to land and at which to marvel at the beautiful freaks of nature. But it is an atom of land hardly intended by nature as a habitation for man. What spots among the broad waters should be taken in hand and made available by man for his home, and what should be left in their desolation is a question very difficult for man to answer; - but I think it may be taken as a rule that no region can be of real value, the products of which must be eked out by charity from other regions. Many a rich and useful country will not provide itself all that it wants; but no country can be rich and useful unless it can provide itself by supplying its own wants, or can purchase what it requires by the sale of its own products. This certainly is not the case with St. Kilda.

After wandering among the cottages for an hour or two, and making acquaintance with the people, we swarmed down upon the beach, all the inhabitants accompanying us. Among them were Miss MacLeod and the minister, who already seemed to be almost old friends. The men helped us along the slippery rocks, and took us by the hand over and over again. Many of them went on board, not unnaturally desiring to satisfy some little want, and to see the last of their strange visitors. There was that coil of rope that was so much desired by the whole island; - and the English-speaking lady had lately been unwell and desired a little brandy for her stomach's sake. As far as I could learn there was not a drop of spirits upon the island, so that some of the worse evils of the larger world had been escaped by the inhabitants of St. Kilda. I had made that lady's malady my peculiar care, and I handed the brandy to the lady's husband. Then we steamed away, I think, amidst their blessings, certainly amidst their cheers.

Who shall say that these people ought to be deported from their homes and placed recklessly upon some point of the mainland? I have not the courage so to say. They themselves, if they were consulted, would probably be averse to such deportation. Were they so deported each individually would suffer, at any rate for a time, by the change. We

*"Rather bear those ills we have  
Than fly to others that we know  
not of."*

But yet their existence cannot be good for them, and certainly not for their posterity; - and as far as we can judge a time will come when that posterity must die out unless the people be removed. In the meantime it appeared to me that all is done for them that present kindness can do. And so, having seen all that there was to be seen at St. Kilda, we continued on upon our adventurous voyage. ■

# “Cornkisters” aka Bothy Ballads

by Gordon Hepburn

Many years ago, in rural Aberdeenshire, a richly agricultural area in the north-east corner of Scotland where I grew up, farm servants did not need to be rocket scientists to determine that an unheated bothy, a barely furnished dwelling where the farm lads slept, was not the most comfortable place for self-entertainment in the long, dark, cold winter evenings; and so, they and their friends from nearby farms assembled in the stable where

## *The Barnyards O'Delgaty*

*One of the most famous of  
all the old bothy ballads*

As I gang doon by Turra Market,  
Turra Market for tae fee  
I fell in wi' a farmer chiel,  
Fae the Barnyards O'Delgaty

Chorus  
Lintin addie, toorin addie,  
Lintin addie toorin ae  
Lintin lowrin' lowrin' lowrin',  
The barnyards o' Delgaty!

He promised me the best horse ever  
That I had set my een upon  
But when I got tae his barnyard,  
There's was naethin' there but skin and bone.  
Chorus

The auld black horse sat on her rump,  
Th' auld grey mare sat on her wime  
And for all that I wad whip an' crack,  
They wouldna rise at yokin' time  
Chorus

When I gang doon tae Kirk on Sunday,  
Many's the bonny lass I see  
Sittin' by her father's side,  
And winkin' ower the pews at me!  
Chorus

Oh I can drink and no get drunken,  
And I can fecht an' no be slain,  
And I can be wi' another's lassie  
But still be welcome tae my ain!  
Chorus

Noo my candle is burnt oot,  
My snotter's fairly on the wane,  
Fare-ye-weel ye Barnyards:  
Ye'll never catch me there again!  
Chorus

considerable heat was generated by the friendly Clydesdale horses.

And there they would sing bothy ballads occasionally to the accompaniment of a melodeon, fiddle, or mouth organ but more likely “a capella.” The lads would sit on the corn kist (corn chest - feed for the horses) and so bothy ballads became much better known as “Cornkisters.” By and large they have a simple lilting melody and they were sung in the Garioch dialect, a Doric peculiar to the north-east, and barely decipherable in other parts of Scotland.

I had two uncles who were tenant farmers and although I was never a permanent farm worker, helping out as I did at hay and harvest time and “tattie” picking, I had the enviable pleasure of sitting and participating with my cousins on many of these evenings in the stable; and grand nights they were.

Many of the Cornkisters have wonderful stories attached to them - here a few:

**The Bonnie Lass o' Fyvie** - a sad song about a captain in the Irish Dragoons falling in love with a pretty, young, sonsie lass from the village of Fyvie. Regrettably the Dragoons were moved on before he could marry her and the captain fell ill before they reached Old Meldrum, only five miles on; and he died of a broken heart when they reached Aberdeen, another 15 miles distant. (I have it on good authority that, although my mother grew up in Fyvie, she was not, in fact, this particular lass.)

**McGinty's Meal and Ale** - whaur the pig gaed on the spree - all about a wild, uproarious meal and ale party at McGinty's farm where his pig broke loose, got into the farmhouse, found the toddy (a whisky-laced drink) and got very drunk, causing complete chaos and consternation.

**The Ball of Kirriemuir** - with eleven verses in print and some 500 quite unprintable. It is reported that at the Second World War Victory March in Tobruk, North Africa, attended by Winston Churchill, the 51st Highland Division marched into the saluting base with the pipes and drums playing “The Ball” with gusto supported by all the infantrymen lustily singing the unprintable verses. The platform party, including General Montgomery, burst out laughing and cheering and when the gist of the song was explained to Churchill, he, too, joined in the cheering.

The BBC reported it all, in good faith, in Britain that same night, not having a clue what the men were singing, but when they were confronted with an explanation the following day “The Ball” was obliterated from the BBC archives in no uncertain manner.

And almost beyond my comprehension is **The Wedding o' McGinnis to his Cross-Eyed Pet** by bothy ballad singers Willy Kemp and Tom Wright.

There's a taste of the mischief we used to get up to in rural Aberdeenshire some seventy years ago. I cannot speak for life there today as I left to volunteer for the Royal Marines shortly thereafter and never returned permanently again to these parts.

They were hard times but they were good times. ■

## *The Weddin' o' McGinnis tae his Cross-Eyed Pet*

Come and listen to my sang and I'll tell  
ye' o' a waddin',  
On the 31st of July in a town called  
Sleepy Steadin;  
A' the countryside was there, though they  
didnae get a biddin,  
At the weddin' o' McGinnis tae his cross-  
eyed pet.

chorus: Tootle-ootle went the flute!  
Diddle, diddle, went the fiddle,  
And the jing-a-ring went up and doon and  
back and through the middle,  
And the jing-a-ring went roond about like  
sheelicks in a riddle,  
At the weddin' o' McGinnis tae his cross-  
eyed pet.

O, a tailor wi' a timmer leg, he danced wi'  
a' was intae't,  
In the middle o' a foursome reel, he brak it  
through and tint it.  
He gaed hame wi' a barra-shaft and he  
was quite contented,  
At the weddin' o' McGinnis tae his cross-  
eyed pet.

For there were a chiel cam ower the field,  
he min't ye on a arra'  
He come there on a bicycle, was hurled  
hame on a barra;  
And of a' the ball I ever was at, I never  
was at a marra,  
At the weddin' o' McGinnis tae his cross-  
eyed pet.

We had plenty to eat, we had frost-bitten  
liver  
As sure as I'm here, and as sure as I never  
And the taste o' the beef nearly gied us a'  
the feather,  
At the weddin' o' McGinnis tae his cross-  
eyed pet.

Noo, there was a chiel come ower the  
field, his name was Butter Scotty  
He was made up wi' a plaster and a potty;  
He come there wi' a hundred pound, he  
gaed hame wi' but ae notie.  
At the weddin' o' McGinnis tae his cross-  
eyed pet.

# Menstrie Castle and the Canadian Connection

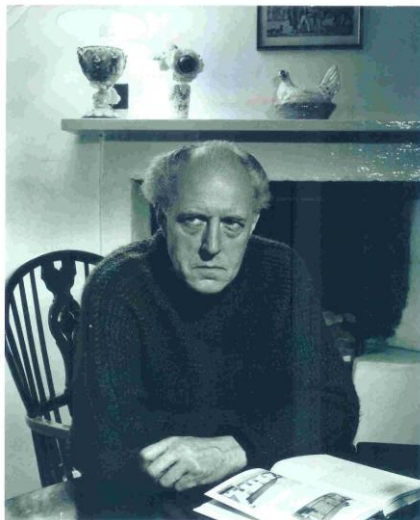
In the 1950s, Menstrie Castle was a tumbling ruin, needing only the attentions of the demolition workers to clear it out of the way of a new housing scheme. A few years later it became one of the Scotland's show places with a library on whose walls is commemorated a fascinating chapter in Scottish history.

The link between Menstrie Castle, the New World, and over 100 gentlemen of title is provided by William Alexander, who was born there about 400 years ago. There is some doubt as to the year of his birth. Some authorities give it as 1567; others suggest it may have been ten years or so later.

His family held Menstrie Castle from their Lords Superior, the Earls of Argyll. Young William, a scholar of some brilliance, became tutor to the young Earl and travelled with him in Italy and France. He was a poet, too, and published verse.

Like many young Scots of his age, he found it necessary to follow his King to London, there to seek preferment at Court. Unlike many others, he was successful. King James VI took to him, made the young man a member of his household and knighted him.

By 1612 Sir William had become interested in the colonization of America, a subject which was to affect his whole life. In 1621 the King gave him a grant of extensive



The high profile of the late actor, film star and radio and TV producer, Moultrie R Kelsall (above) was instrumental in garnering support for the restoration of Menstrie Castle

territories "between our colonies of New England and Newfoundland" a phrase covering an enormous area of land. This was to be New Scotland... "Nova Scotia, to be beholden of us from our Kingdome of Scotland as part thereof united therewith."

The task of colonization was to be Sir William's principal interest from then on, and the King appointed him his Lieutenant of New Scotland.

Money was needed to further the project. James proceeded to raise it by the same means as he had used to finance the Plantation of Ulster -- the sale of the newly created dignity of Baronet, in this case of Nova Scotian baronetcies.

Applicants were required to pay Sir William 1,000 merks and to provide, for the service of the new country six armed men, each victualled and supplied for two years. From the inception of the scheme it was realized that the second provision was a much more difficult obligation to shoulder than the first, and those who sought the dignity were permitted to pay a penalty of 2,000 merks instead. This meant that the baronetcies could be purchased for a total of 3,000 merks, or £166 13 shillings and 4 pence.

There was no great rush, however, and though the creation of the baronetcies continued until the Union of the Parliaments in 1707 there were fewer than 200 of them.

But to return to Sir William; though honours were heaped on him -- he became Earl of Stirling, Viscount of Canada and Lord Alexander of Tullibody -- and though he did his best to get the new colony on its feet, he was defeated.

The sovereignty of the land on the Eastern seaboard of Canada, so lightly parcelled out in London in grants of 30,000 acres to the first baronets, had from the beginning been disputed by the French, and in 1632 Charles I conceded it to Louis XIII, and ordered the settlers to burn their buildings. He continued, however, to create baronets.

The Earl of Stirling was now an impoverished man. In recognition of his efforts, the King granted him a warrant for £10,000. But it was only a piece of paper; there was little likelihood of his ever obtaining the money, and in 1635 he was given another great grant of land this time including the province of Maine and Long Island, which he renamed the Isle of Stirling.

He died in 1640. Twenty years later his heirs, pleading... "his vast expence and



Menstrie Castle at the foot of the Ochils

wastenance of his whole estate" were still trying to obtain the money.

In the 1950s, as the castle crumbled, the story of the Nova Scotian baronetcies was recalled. Sir William Younger, Lord Lieutenant of the County, Mr. Moultrie Kelsall and others began a campaign for saving it. Mr. W. H. Henry, county architect of Clackmannanshire, drew up a provisional plan for adapting the building as modern flats.

Help came from across the Atlantic from the Lieutenant Governor and from the Premier of Nova Scotia; and from the National Trust for Scotland. Nearly £9,500 was raised, sufficient to save the building. Two rooms were set aside for commemoration of the baronets, and in December 1963 these were opened by Lord Kilmaine, himself a Nova Scotian baronet, and Secretary of the Pilgrim Trust, which had donated £1,000 to the original appeal.

Further assistance to the project also came from across the Atlantic when Mr. H. P. McKenn, Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia, handed over in Edinburgh two cheques for 1,000 dollars each for the National Trust for Scotland's endowment fund for the Nova Scotia Room.

The principal feature of the room is as unusual as it is colourful -- a wall displaying the coats of arms of all the baronetcies still extant. There are 116, of which 109 have coats of arms, and all except two of these are displayed. The coats of arms are grouped round a portrait of Charles 1 on loan from the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. Maps show the places in Scotland from which the baronets took their titles, and the areas of the virgin soil of Canada which they were so optimistically allocated.

These days the castle is run by the National Trust for Scotland and visitors can stay in a recently updated self-catering castle apartment and be constantly reminded of Menstrie's part in the history of Scotland and Canada. ■

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