



*Lean gu dlùth ri cliù do shinnsear*

An  
**Teachdaire**  
**Gaidhealach**

Aireamh 72  
Am Màrt 2006

Issue 72  
March 2006



Published by  
**Comunn Gàidhlig Astràilia**  
ISSN 0727-6540

## Editorial

With my time as editor coming to a close, I will take the opportunity to make a few remarks. In particular, I want to thank all those who gave their time, energy and expertise to assist with the copy. Some friendships have been strengthened along the way and I have come to appreciate some of the problems editors face.

With deadlines looming, I understand the gloom of the editor waiting for copy to arrive. I also appreciate the art of doing more with less.

My lack of Gaelic was/is a limitation but, as they say, it has been a learning experience. Nevertheless, some editions of the magazine were very satisfying to produce. I am proud to have made a contribution to keeping this vibrant language alive, at least in print. With the trend towards fewer languages around the globe, it is important to nurture those still contributing to community life, culture and values. The role of language in this is crucial. The demise of a traditional language means more than just linguistic loss – something much more than this also vanishes or is diminished: a certain spirit or soul – something unique. In its small way, our magazine makes a contribution to keeping Gaelic alive. But its time for another to take the reins.

Dianne Selinger

## Ann an iris seo

I have included a profile of a contributor, Seònaid Nic an Tòisich / Janet Toshack. A very interesting woman, I am sure you will agree.

I have also included an article written some time back by Murdo Morrison. Murdo now lives in Scotland where 'the breezes blow' and he writes still. Perhaps we will have other pieces by him in the future.

## Molaidhean

Seo grunn mholaidhean dhut/ here's a few recommendations for you:

[http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/alba/foghlam/beag\\_air\\_bheag/index.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/alba/foghlam/beag_air_bheag/index.shtml)

<http://www.taic.btinternet.co.uk/Leasain.htm>

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/colinandcumberland/>

<http://www.smo.uhi.ac.uk/gaidhlig/ionnsachadh/bgfp/>

Agus seo forum far am bi luchd-ionnsachaidh a' faighinn taic, And here's a forum where learners can get help



### **Ishbel buoyed by southerly Gaels**

"I tend to judge a country by the people I've met, and I have found the people here in Australia to be very warm-hearted, generous and kind. These people ... (who attended the concerts) ... were from all walks of life and not all of them Scots by any means," said Ishbel MacAskill, in one of the many radio interviews that she gave on her just-completed first visit to Australia.

Ishbel was brought to Australia by Còisir Ghàidhlig Astràilianach, the Gaelic choir based in Sydney. It came about through Judy Scott, the choir's President, attending a short course in Gaelic song taught by Ishbel at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. On meeting Ishbel, Judy decided that if she couldn't get her whole choir to the Gàidhealtachd, she would bring an exponent of the Gaelic culture to Sydney; she invited Ishbel to visit, and the plan was hatched. Ishbel was delighted to agree, and so Judy set about liaising with Gaels and Gaelic-interested folk over the full length of Australia's eastern seaboard, to see that Ishbel's visit was as encompassing and varied as possible and to share the Gaelic music as widely as could be done.

Ishbel arrived in Melbourne on a BA flight that touched down pre-dawn on a mid-May morning, and was quickly into the fray, hosting a song workshop with the Victorian Gaelic Choir that very evening. Her time in Melbourne was hosted by the Scottish Gaelic Society of Victoria, an organisation flourishing under the leadership of Joan Mitchell from Lewis, and which recently celebrated its Centenary of active membership. Ishbel featured that week at a céilidh organised by the SGSV, supported by other local performers, and the céilidh was a sell-out.

Then, to Sydney. A highlight of her visit was having Ishbel join the performers at "Autumn in the Highland Manor", an annual event organised by the Sydney choir as

a tribute to Lachlan Macquarie, the man from Mull (though born on Ulva) who is revered as the most famous and productive of New South Wales' Governors during the time the land remained a British colony. Ishbel was formally introduced to the Governor as an embodiment of Gaelic, the culture that had given rise to Macquarie and all he contributed to the Australian nation and character. Performances were in and around Old Government House, the house that had been Macquarie's home and is now a museum maintained by the National Trust of Australia, but success at an event can sometimes be a two-edged sword: at one point, the crowds became so large that Ishbel and the choir had to take their performances outside, so the property would not be damaged by people squeezing for elbow room.

To Ishbel's delight, and that of the Gaels and Gaelic learners in Australia, the response to Ishbel's presence and performances continued to be eager and enthusiastic. She gave Gaelic song workshops in both Sydney and Canberra for Gaelic learners and folk musicians, and was exceptionally well-received on both occasions. Her visit to Canberra included a concert at the Merry Muse, a local folk club, which proved so popular it quickly became standing room only, at the conclusion of which Ishbel received a spontaneous and unanimous standing ovation. Ishbel was supported by Dr Ruth Martin, a lecturer in music at the Australian National University, herself a Gaelic learner, and now lead singer of a new Gaelic-jazz fusion group, "Eilean Mòr". The band is about to tour Scotland, where Ruth will also be giving a paper at an upcoming conference at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig.

Of course, though, there is no time to rest on laurels; as someone asked at the close of one event, "so, who are you going to bring to Australia next !"

As so many do, Ishbel delights in children, and even more so in children embracing the culture she has known and loved. So it was special for her indeed that the concert in Canberra was opened by children from the local Steiner school, Orana, singing "Brochan lom, tana lom" and other Gaelic songs they had learned. She responded eagerly to the invitation of Velma McKeachie, their teacher, to visit the school the next morning, where the children sang her more songs and then learned a new one, "Crodh-laoidh nam Bodach", from Ishbel. It was an amazing sight, to see Ishbel and these children standing in a hand-held circle and singing such music, and kangaroos lazing in the morning sun in the next paddock.

As a pleasing side note, it turns out that Velma and Graeme ("Bran") McKeachie, the musical director of the Sydney choir, are in fact directly related, both descended from the one family of South Uist who later moved to Wigtown before Velma's ancestors moved to Vancouver in Canada and Bran's moved to the south-east of Australia. Perhaps blood holds many connections, though; their paths have now crossed, only for them to find they are both passionate about Gaelic music.

After Sydney, Ishbel moved north to Brisbane, to be re-united with Gibb Todd, a long-time singing chum from their many appearances in the Celtic Connections tours together, and his wife Annie. Ishbel closed her Australian visit with a concert with Gibb in Brisbane, before flying home to meet her new grandchild, Cora, who had arrived since Ishbel touched ground in Australia.

For the Australian choir, it was Ishbel's last performance in Sydney that perhaps sums up the value of her visit. Gaels galore turned up to people the hall with smiling,

understanding nods during her between-songs comments to the audience; voices swelled to join in the choruses of many of the numbers Ishbel sang that afternoon; and many tears were shed in remembrances of older times. It was a gathering of Australian Gaelic stalwarts, from Michelina Astle and Calum and Elizabeth Ann Currie of Barra through to Angus Darkie MacLeod and Ann McKeown of Lewis, and Robin MacKenzie-Hunter of Assynt in Sutherland, the man who started the Gaelic choir in Sydney nearly 24 years ago and without whom Gaelic music would probably not have a voice in this part of the world.

The buzz, the joy, the spirit of the Gaels was palpable at the concert even to those who had not a word of the Gaelic themselves; all were moved by the life in the music.

Great thanks indeed go to Ishbel MacAskill herself, and to Judy Scott of Còisir Ghàidhlig Astràilianach for making possible this celebration of Gaelic song.



**June 10th @ East Brisbane bowls club  
Performance by Ishbel MacAskill supported by Gibb Todd**

Gibb Todd opened our evening, with his mellow, rich voice “like an oak barrel”, skilful song choices, and rambling stories and reminiscences. He is a charming performer filled with good humour and a warm stage presence which creates an intimate and responsive atmosphere. His wide ranging repertoire, skillfully accompanied on guitar and banjo, (the “American instrument”), had the audience singing along in true folk club style. Standouts for me were his renditions of Ewan McColl’s “Forty foot trailer” and “Shoals of herring” and a fine song of his own “To Canada”. I only wished he would stop interrupting himself mid-song for a quick anecdote or amusing quip so as to fully enjoy his performance.

Then on to the main event. Ishbel MacAskill hails from the Isle of Lewis, and was raised speaking Gaelic as her first language. Her gentle understated delivery was enchanting, filled with a genuine sense of humour and obvious love and passion for

her repertoire. From her first song you could have heard a pin drop, the audience hung on every note. Even after warning that in listening to her singing unaccompanied traditional Gaelic songs, we were in for an evening of "drowning, dying and being dumped" ranging from the "doleful to the deeply doleful" the audience was entranced! Her superb interpretations rendered any language barrier non-existent. When Ishbel sang all the passion, joy and melancholy of the Gaels shone through, it was the song that mattered. Even on an evening when her performance was sponsored by "lempsip and strepsils" her rich, warm and emotive voice astounded the audience with its depth, skill, elegance and range, - truly a beautiful instrument. Standout moments for me were the Waulking Set, An Teid Thu Leam a Mhairi (Will you go with me Mary), and An Ataireachd Ard, (The Eternal Surge of the Sea). Simply an outstanding performer.

I would encourage those of you who missed Ishbel this time around to keep an eye out for return appearances – I hope she will be back to our shores soon. Meanwhile her latest album "Essentially Ishbel" is available over the net.

## Murdo Morrison

Tha mi an duil a bhi aig am Mod Rioghal Naisunta air a bhliadhna seo ann am baile Steornabhagh – baile mor nan Eilean Siair.

Bidh mi ann airson craobh sgaoileadh fad seachduinn a Mhod agus bidh am program a dol gun an Eilean Siair agus cuideach gu Tir Mor.

Gu Redio an T-Oban – Gu Redio na Cuillin anns and Eilean Sgiathanach, gu Redio Heartland ann an Siorrach Peairt, Gu Redio Speysound tuath air an sin agus cuideach gu Redio Earra Ghaidheal.

Tha obair mhor an cois sin ach obair math le sgiobadh a bhitheas gu math trang fad an seachduinn a tional naigheah a Mhod, co dhunaidhean co fharpuisean, agus criomagan beag agus mor a bheir blas a Mhod do phios mor de Alba.

I am hoping this year (2005) to be at the Royal National Mod in Stornoway the main town in the Western Isles.

I will be there for broadcasting for the whole week of the Mod and this will be broadcast to the Western Isles and also to the Mainland

To Radio Oban, Radio Cuilins in the Island of Skye and to Radio Heartland in Perthshire and to Speysound Radio North of Perth and also to Argyll Radio.

There is a lot of work involved but good work with a good crew kept very busy all week gathering news of the Mod and results of competitions and little snippets that will bring the taste of the Mod to a large part of Scotland.

Is e seo an coig bliadhna deug a tha mi air a bhi sas anns an obair seo agus ged a tha e saraichte ann an iomadh doigh tha e na thogail inntinn do'n sgiobadh agus cuideach dhomh fhin.

This is my fifteenth year that I am involved in this work and although it can be quite tiring in many ways it is a stimulating time for the Crew and also for myself.

Tha gach latha eadar dhealaichte agus tha am Mod a toiseachadh le fosgladh oifigeil air oidche Di H-Aoine agus bidh sin ann an Talla Bhaile Steornabhagh.

Every day is different and the Mod begins with the Official opening on Friday night and that will be in Stornoway Town Hall.

Air Di Sathuirn tha am Mod a gluasadh gun na Eileanan deas agus gu sonraichte mu'n cuairt air an sgoil mor ur ann an Lionacleit ann am Beinn a Bhaoghaltach

On Saturday the Mod moves to the Southern Isles and especially around the big new school at Lionacleit In Benbecuela

Ann an sin bidh ceol na fìdhle, ceoil a Phiob Mhor , ceol piano agus is e seo latha sonraichte far a bheil Caman air a chluich agus moran dhaoine anns an luch eisdeach agus amharc air gach ni a tha dol air adhairt.

There will be fiddle music, bagpipe music, piano music and this is the special day where Shinty is played and many people will be listening and watching all that is going on.

Air Di Domhnaich bi seirbheas Eadar Chreideamh ann an da aite ann an Lionacleit agus seirbheas eile ann an Steornabhagh.

On Sunday there will be an ecumenical service in Lionacleit and another Service in Stornoway.

Di-Luain agus Di Mairt – is iad sin laithean a chlann og aig a Mhod agus Di Ceudan bi measgachadh de nithean a tachairt. D-Airdaoin agus Di- Haoine bidh coisearan a iomadh aite a gabhail pairt.

Monday and Tuesday - these are the children's day at the lMod and On Wednesday there will be a mixture of happenings. Thursday and Friday the choirs will be taking part.

Anns nan coisearan bidh earrainn nam measg a feuchainn air co-fharpuis seinn ceathrar agus cuideach daoine tu muigh nan coisearan.

In the choirs there will be sections taking part in the competitions For quartets and also people from outwith the choirs

**A**ch is e co fharpais Bonn Or a Mhod a bhitheas a mhor chuid a leanntuinn.

**B**ut it is the competitions for the Gold Medal that most people follow.

**T**ha iomadh ceum a choisich eadar nan aitean far a bheil na farpuiseach agus feumaidh anail gu leoir a bhi aca air son sin agus air son sinn cuideach.

**T**here are many steps to walk between the places for the competitions and plenty of breath is needed by them to sing as well!

**M**u'n tig feasgar Di H-aoine bidh beachd air co a bhunaich am Bonn Or am fear agus an te a tha faighin ard duais a Mhod agus de an Coisir tha air an taghadh Seann Nos neo Nos ur tha urram mor seo a bhi

**B**efore Friday night comes there will be knowledge about who has won the Gold Medals the man or the woman who will get the supreme award at the Mod and who has been chosen for the Old style of singing or the new style there is a great honour in this.

**C**han fhaigh mi fhin as duais sam bidh ach an toileachas a bhidh ann.

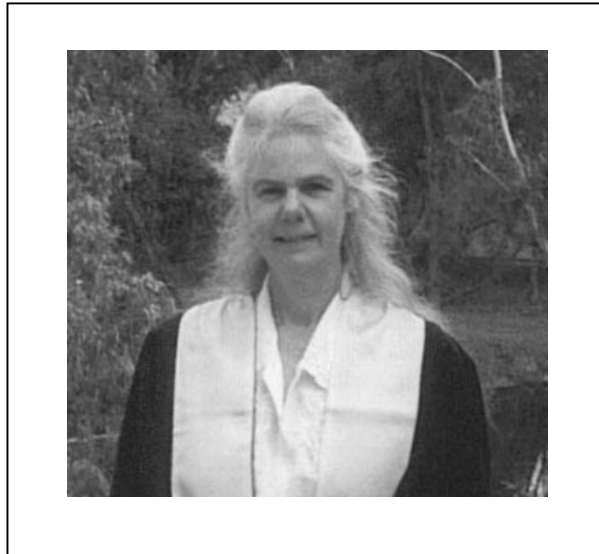
**I** will not win any prizes but the satisfaction of being there.

**N**a mo bheachdsa chan eil dad air an talamh coltach ris.

**I**n my opinion there is nothing in the world like it.

**Murchadh Moireasdan.**

**Murdo Morrison**



'S mise Seònaid Nic an Tòisich, no Janet Toshack anns a' Bheurla. Tha ainm eile orm, tha Jani Baker ann!

I teach Yoga and train yoga teachers. Although most people perceive Yoga as a physical exercise practice, those who know better realize that it is a profound philosophical enquiry into life, being and Reality, and is much more a meditative discipline than a merely physical program. As such, I find it satisfying in every way. Meditation takes me deep into the most unchanging place in myself, and the philosophical aspects are intellectually pleasing too, even though one must not mistake intellectualism for the good things that the enquiry brings.

Gàidhlig is my other love. I would love to be able to discuss Yoga and meditation in the Gàidhlig! But not only are my Gaelic skills very limited as yet, I am also fazed by the ambiguity of words in Gàidhlig. For instance, is it possible to distinguish between mind, soul, psyche and self? Or to find a word that distinguishes contemplation, thinking, opinion, and the stillness of meditation? Well, perhaps even English with its huge vocabulary has a problem there – I usually call it Still-mind Meditation, or no-thought state... to tell the truth, there may not be a single word available for it. Except in Sanskrit!

I became interested in the Gàidhlig after I began to read a bit of Scottish history, because of my family background. I was chuffed to find that my birth name, Toshack, is actually a Gaelic name. After a while, I thought that without the language, I would always only be an outsider to my own roots. And I would like to share the Gaelic heritage with many others in Australia. How many Macdonalds or Frasers or Menzies truly recognise that their origins lie in a language and a culture other than English, despite the Scottish link? Like all peoples who have had their language and culture taken away from them, they have also lost their historical identity – getting the language back is the best way to reclaim it

## **SOME REFLECTIONS ON HIGHLAND WOMAN BY SORLEY MACLEAN**

This powerful cry or lament against the plight of the women of Scottish crofters who had to toil so unremittingly in order to subsist in a feudalistic society is full of both pity and anger that this burden rests so unjustly on the shoulders of those who deserved better. No doubt the English translation gives us some sense of the Gaelic original's sounds and rhythms but the strength of MacLean's feeling comes through even if something is lost in the translation

Who could look at her but not be moved? This question is directed at Jesus. The contrast between the promise of the New Testament's 'Son of God' and the Old Testament harshness of the existence of this archetypal Highland Woman is brought out with bitter irony by the poet. There is little glory in her life. Very little relief or comfort of any sort. No spiritual sustenance has reached her. Her physical 'black' labour, to support her family and to build the wealth of the landowners, leaves its mark on her body which has been transformed from 'white smoothness' to a state of wretchedness. The impact of the colour imagery is insistent and strong: she has gone from the bloom of youth to a darker, worn-out state. Then the 'gentle Church' rebukes her for 'the lost state of her miserable soul' and she is condemned to unremitting toil until she finds 'black peace in a grave'. In a final, disturbing rebuke, 'her time' is compared to 'a black slush'. Sorley's MacLean's portrait is harsh and unsentimental: it challenges us to think about life, society and justice.

Note: Unfortunately, we were unable to get a response from Sorley's copyright holder on republishing the poem. It can be found online @ <http://www.scottishradiance.com/poet/poet0901.htm> or in Nua-Bhardachd Ghaidhlig Modern Scottish Gaelic Poems (1995), Introduced by Donald MacAulay, ISBN 0862414946, Canongate Classics

## The First Gaelic Service in Australia

By Jo McIntyre, great grandniece of Rev William McIntyre,

On a summer evening in December 1837 a large crowd assembled for Divine service at the Scots Church in Jamieson Street, Sydney. The Sydney Gazette reported :

“For the first time in this Colony, and we believe for the first time south of the line, the public worship of God was heard in the ancient language of the Gael. The scene was indescribably affecting; many who for years had been absent from the land of their fathers, had assembled to hear the words of truth in the hallowed language of their infancy, and to join with their countrymen in offering up their prayers and their praises at the throne of the Almighty. The Rev Mr McIntyre who had just arrived, conducted the service.”

In 1837 Sydney was a unique society, a tough penal settlement of some 80,000 people of whom only 20% were free. It was drastically short of women and labour, and competition for numbers and influence raged between the religious denominations. The Presbyterian cause was fiercely promoted by Dr John Dunmore Lang, the founder of the Presbyterian Church in the Colony.

Spurred on by the introduction of the Bounty System for free immigrants, and by the 1836 Church Act which gave government financial aid to all congregations, proportional to size, Lang leapt into action. He persuaded the British and colonial governments to organize the free emigration to the Colony of hundreds of destitute Highland Scots, funded from the sale of land.

The Rev William McIntyre was appointed Chaplain on the second of these voyages, on the 414 ton barque Midlothian, which left from Portree, Isle of Skye, on 8 August, 1837. McIntyre had studied Arts and Divinity at the University of Glasgow, and been ordained earlier that year. His 260 fellow emigrants were mainly married couples and their children. All received payment for passage and outfit. The men included shepherds, agricultural workers, tradesmen and artisans. Some could read and write, some could not. As over 200 could speak only Gaelic they were provided with a Gaelic-speaking doctor as well as a Gaelic-speaking chaplain. On the long voyage doctor and minister presided at the deaths of some 30 women and children from fever and dysentery.

At the service in Scots Church on 17 December the Midlothian immigrants joined hundreds of Highlanders from Sydney and outlying districts. As no other minister in the Colony could speak Gaelic, many had travelled long distances to attend.

Before the congregation was a thirty-one year old, diminutive man - an earnest, pious, puritanical, erudite man with a quiet and modest manner, who had been a teacher and headmaster in Glasgow. His discourse that evening was described as “distinguished for a power of mind, and a chasteness of language quite unusual.”

“In the close of his sermon,” as the Gazette reported, “the Rev Mr McIntyre made a touching appeal to the feelings of those who had accompanied him over the mighty deep. It was probably the last time he should have it in his power to address them, and

he urged them not to forget the God of their fathers, in the land of darkness in which their lot had been cast."

It was the last time he addressed the immigrants as a group, even though they had been led to believe that they would not be separated. As it turned out, about half were settled on small farms on the Hunter Valley estate of Lang's brother. This special treatment by the colonial government caused considerable ill-will towards them.

Initially McIntyre was also destined for the Hunter district— for Maitland, the growing commercial centre. Three years later, however, he was still in Sydney, assisting Lang in the Scots Church, preaching every Sabbath once in Gaelic and twice in English, and regularly travelling to the Hunter to preach in Gaelic there.

In 1841 McIntyre was at last settled in Maitland. In October 1846, under his leadership, the Presbyterian Church of Eastern Australia, espousing pure Free Church principles, was formed. With unflinching courage and high-principled consistency, or with treacherous self-conceit and fondness for power, depending on your point of view, he subsequently provided the uncompromising arguments for resisting union with other elements of the Presbyterian Church in Australia. He dominated the PCEA until his death in 1870.

McIntyre also made an impact on education. In the mid 1850s he established at Maitland the first High School outside Sydney. Salaries and running costs were met entirely by voluntary contributions. Sir Samuel Griffith, the school's most famous pupil, spoke with admiration of McIntyre's teaching of the Classics. He described how McIntyre always took great pains to disguise his strong Gaelic accent, assiduously adopting the English accent that was used at the University of Sydney.

McIntyre also gained some notoriety. In 1844 he used a special license to marry the elderly and extremely wealthy Mary McIntyre, who was believed to be his cousin. This drew much sardonic criticism. Mary's wealth certainly gave William independence and the financial means to fund the High School and many costly Free Church causes. Yet their letters show they were kindred spirits and fond of each other.

In 1860 McIntyre gained further notoriety by causing a religiously-inspired riot in Maitland. Insisting on his right to freedom of speech on the highly-charged issue of State aid for religion, he announced his intention to deliver a lecture titled *The Heathenism of Popery*, proved and illustrated. He and his family were assaulted in a fierce attack by Irish Catholics.

The first Gaelic service was commemorated at St George's Free Presbyterian Church in Sydney in 1939, over 101 years later. 200 people were present. The service was conducted in Gaelic by Rev Neil MacLeod.