

Doctors in the Parish of Lochs from circa 1860 to the present day

by Alex M. Macleod.

The first doctor appointed to the Parish of Lochs around 1860 was Dr. Douglas Sinclair who probably resided at Soval Lodge where the doctors who practised in Lochs stayed as there was no permanent residence in the Parish until 1889. (The late Douglas Sinclair Macaulay who resided at Balallan was named after this doctor.)

Dr. Sinclair was succeeded around 1870 by a native of the Parish, Dr. Roderick Ross, who resided at Valtos Farm, Lochs — a room at Valtos House is still known as the Surgery. Dr. Ross married a daughter of the tenant at Valtos, Alexander Mackenzie (Alasdair MacEachain), a sea-captain whose wife was a native of Caithness.

Dr. Ross's father was Allan Ross known in Lewis as *An Ceistear Ross*, who was born at Crobeg Farm in the Parish in 1801. His father was Rory Ross who was tacksman at Cromore in 1880. Rory was a great-great-grandfather of the late Rt. Hon. Iain Macleod, probably the most notable Lewisman in his generation.

Life was very hard for doctors in those days as they did their rounds, especially in Lochs and Uig, by foot and by boat. In 1860 the Stornoway-Harris road ended in the vicinity of Soval Lodge, at a place called *Fuaran Shobhail* — the Soval Spring. After leaving Lochs Dr. Ross took over at Barvas where he practised until he retired. Various other doctors practised in the Parish after the departure of Dr. Ross, such as Dr. MacNaughton and Dr. Macdonald.

In 1889 a permanent residence was erected at Keose for the Parish doctors on the site occupied by the first school in the Parish which opened in 1796. Allan Ross, already mentioned, taught in this school until he moved to Carloway in 1832. The last teacher in the old school was a Mr. Crawford who was appointed to Knockiandue when the school opened in 1889.

There were two Sewing and Spinning schools in the Parish prior to 1796 and another Sewing and Spinning School was opened in the Ness area in 1738.

The first doctor to occupy the newly erected Doctor's house at Keose was Dr. Macaulay who was a native of Uist, and stayed in Keose for about seven years. (A grand-daughter of Dr Macaulay, who was also a doctor, visited Lewis several years ago when she acted as locum for Dr. Matheson, Uig). A son of Dr. Macaulay, Roderick, who was born at Keose, emigrated to Peru, South America, where he was employed for a number of years as a railway

guard with the Carro De Pasco Railway. In 1928 he met with a serious accident and had to retire.

The Carro De Pasco Railway is the highest in the world; it reached an altitude of 15,000 feet and ends in the mining town of Carro De Pasco, the highest town in the world, and known as the 'roof of the world'.

After Dr. Macaulay, a Dr. Mahon, probably Irish, came to Lochs. He died in 1896 at 27, Laxay, where he resided.

In 1900, Dr. Allan Cameron, a native of Lochaber, was appointed, but owing to ill-health he left Lewis in 1920 and died at Cambuslang in 1922 a comparatively young man. During his University days at Aberdeen he was a notable athlete in the heavy events. Once when crossing Loch Erisort on a stormy day to visit patients in South Lochs his sailing-boat capsized. The doctor's plight was seen by Garyvard men who hurried to the rescue and picked him up after he had been clinging to his up-turned boat for quite a while.

A fine Gaelic tribute was paid to Dr. Cameron by the well known Leurbost bard, the late Rev. Murdo Smith, who at the time was on the staff of the local school at Keose. In one of his songs he says of him:—

*Tha lighiche ainmeil
Gu siubhal garbhlaich
Moch no anmoch
Nuair thig an tòir air
Ged bhiodh e garbhach
Aig Ailean Cham-Shròn
Cha diùlt e falbh leinn
Air muir no mòintich.*

Dr. Cameron was the owner of the first motor-car to come to the Parish in 1917 — a model T Ford Registration number JS710.

Up until this time the doctors sometimes depended on horse transport for land journeys and strangely the last horse in the Parish belonged to Dr. Ian K. McIntosh, the present practitioner.

Dr. Cameron's successor was a Lewisman, Dr. Donald Campbell, who hailed from Ness. Like his predecessor he was a fearless sailor and he crossed Loch Erisort on many a stormy day in his sailing-boat. Latterly he obtained a motor launch and he had a motor-bicycle in Garyvard to provide him with a means of transport during his visits to the various villages in South Lochs. About 1925 when the road to South Lochs was completed he managed his rounds by car.

In 1938 Dr. Campbell moved to Leurbost where a new doctor's residence had been erected. He died there in 1947 at the age of 58. Around 1934 Lochs

was divided into two separate medical practices, North and South Lochs. The first doctor appointed to Gravir was a Stornoway man, Dr. Hector Macdonald, whose ancestors belonged to Glencoe, and later settled in Orinsay. In 1832 the four brothers in the family were evicted and settled in Keose, at the croft now known as No.11 . (Lewis crofts weren't numbered until after the Napier Report in 1886). They settled in a house occupied by Allan Ross — *An Ceistear*. A few years later two of the brothers settled in Crossbost where several of their descendants are still to be found. Dr. Macdonald took over at North Lochs after the death of Dr. Campbell. The practice is now carried on by Dr. Ian MacIntosh.

We feel that a record of the doctors in the Parish wouldn't be complete without reference being made to Rev. Ewen Campbell who was born in Nova Scotia in 1830 and who was in Keose from 1870-89. Rev. Ewen Campbell had a reputation in Lewis as a physician though he was not qualified in medicine. People came to consult him from all over Lewis and some of his 'cures' are still remembered locally. He maintained that the colds prevalent during the months of Spring originated in the phosphorus mines in Russia and that the cause was the dust carried by the prevailing Easterly winds over our shores. Within recent years a foreign 'bug' appeared on the Lewis horizon and was diagnosed by the medical profession as Red 'Flu! For the common cold it is doubtful whether Rev. Mr. Campbell would recommend water from *Tobar Fhionnlaigh* — Finlay's Well — although he did prescribe it for various illnesses. According to local tradition the well had healing 'powers' and it is still in use on croft No. 2 Keose.

We congratulate Leurbost School on attaining its centenary and our fervent wish is that under God's guidance it will go from strength to strength.

The good folk of Leurbost should be grateful to Balallan which sent them their first schoolmaster 160 years ago — 1819. His name was Murdoch Macleod and he was the first Headmaster at Balallan when the Gaelic School was established in 1815 on croft No. 16. The present headmaster at Leurbost is also a Balallan man. Murdoch Macleod was transferred to Callanish in 1825.

We doubt if the present generation of Lewis Headmasters would relish the system in operation in 1814. Their salaries were collected by the proprietor from every tenant in Lewis along with the yearly rent. Although money was a scarce commodity in Lewis in those days the rents were far higher than they are nowadays. In spite of this the proprietor levied a charge of 1/- (5p) towards the Doctor's salary and 6d (2½p) towards the Schoolmaster's salary.

Were those the "good old days"? We leave the readers to decide.

MY BABIES ARE HAVING BABIES

by Dr. Ian K. MacIntosh

My babies are having babies! Yes, that's how long I have been practising medicine in North Lochs. My family and I arrived here in Lewis on the thirteenth of July, 1960, and I well remember hiding from my wife that it was the thirteenth, lest she should fear that it was an unlucky day to come! I need not have worried for these have been happy and interesting years during which I have seen and participated in many changes in Island life.

Nineteen years ago the Island was just beginning to recover from the years of neglect it had suffered both during and previous to the War. Older persons forget, and younger ones have never known conditions as they then existed, thus it is interesting to recall North Lochs and general practice as I knew it first.

The first thing that comes to mind is housing conditions. Houses were almost impossible either to buy or rent. We were lucky for after much searching we were able to buy the croft "Druim Dubh" with 33 acres of land. The house was in excellent condition having just been renovated by the late Dan Macleod who later married the Crossbost Postmistress. For the improvements we paid £1,200. Imagine nowadays what such a croft would fetch on the open market! We had over three happy years in that little house and compared with many it had excellent amenities. For example, we had a bathroom with running water! Admittedly the water looked more like tea than water for it was pumped from a well on the croft and in a dry spell there were no baths, and "flushing only if necessary", but it was a functional bathroom. I remember too how lucky we were with our milk delivery; the milk came in big cans and we were the first house on the run. We got practically pure cream whilst the far end of Leurbost had to make do with blue milk!

The villages had no running water and no mains sewerage, thus kitchen and toilet facilities tended to be primitive. Think now of our warm, large, airy kitchens and elaborate bathroom suites; certainly some of the many changes for the better.

From housing improvements my mind runs to the roads that connect the villages, and what changes there are here too. Even the road to Stornoway was single track with passing places and a trip to town was quite an adventure, usually on one day a week only. Now, if I am in a hurry, I can travel these seven miles in six minutes. But the straightening and widening of the roads have had their disadvantages. Road accidents were rare as speeding was impossible; consequently there were few serious accidents. Now, sadly, the accidents are often serious and not infrequently fatal. It is

worth while remembering that it is better to arrive five minutes late than not to arrive at all. Furthermore there are many more and faster cars than previously; coupled with abuse of alcohol a drive to Stornoway, particularly on Friday night, can still be quite an adventure, though no longer one to be enjoyed.

Telephones! How I often curse them in my mind, consigning them and their inventor to deepest Hades! Like cars they seem to breed in some inexplicable way causing yet another intrusion into the privacy we have left. Few of you can have sat in my surgery for more than five minutes without disturbance therefrom. I often wonder by how much "late calls" would be reduced if there were a two mile walk to the nearest 'phone box. In most cases Murdo's pain would have settled naturally before the agitated relative summoned up the energy to make the call.

Fishing in both salt and fresh water was one of the great recreations of both the Lewisman and the incomer or holidaymaker. We used to be able to buy "Dublin Bay" prawns for three shillings and six pence a pound, white fish almost given away and herring were delivered to the door for a shilling a score — yes, since I came here! The rivers were full of salmon, nobody was short of "one for the pot", and the sea lochs full of white fish, herring and mackerel. How greedy and shortsighted mankind is with regard to conservation of his resources. In particular the sea is now empty, and the risk of pollution ever on our shores.

Lastly changes in General Practice: here I have seen vast changes in premises, treatments and demand.

Can you remember that there used to be no waiting room, that the surgery was tiny and the dispensary miniscule? Do you remember the rather entertaining four months when Dr. Humphrey and I practised from a caravan, used the garage as a dispensary and had a workman's hut as a waiting room? This was when the present surgery premises were being built. Now we are rather "grand", but the dispensary in particular is no longer adequate. Recently there have been suggestions for turning Gleann Mór into what amounts to a Mini-Health Centre. Such suggestions I have resisted fiercely, for I believe our happy "patient-doctor" relationship would be upset by such a change.

Treatments too are vastly changed — new techniques, new operations, new drugs and sometimes new diseases! As more diseases become amenable to treatment so my workload inevitably increases.

But what a joy it is to be able to treat people with high blood pressure, rheumatism, malignant disease, heart trouble or allergies — amongst many other illnesses — now we even have a kidney machine and will shortly have two.

The increased demand on services is interesting. In 1960 it was rare for a patient to attend the morning surgery, four or five patients being the average for an evening surgery, and I even remember "tossing" the late Dr. Macdonald as to which of us should do the one visit for that day! Normally I suppose we did about eight visits a day between us, but in the year 1977/78 I consulted 4,175 times, visited 2,920 patients in their homes and dispensed 12,131 medicines. In the last eight years during which I have kept accurate figures, I have consulted 31,522 times, visited 22,584 patients and dispensed 80,635 medicines. Changed days!

What of the future? Certainly more change is as inevitable as that day follows night. Let us hope that wise counsel will prevail and that the amenities of these beautiful Islands will not be sacrificed on the altar of so-called progress.

CALABOSD le Iain M. Macleoid

A mach mu Eilean Chalabrigh bha ceilearadh air eòin
Bha 'n iarmailt 'si cho annasach 'san loch gu léir cho ciùin;
Bha runnach air an adhar agus currag air Tir-mór,
Bha sgòthan bàn' a' seòladh àrd thar baile brèagha Chromóir.

Cur cùl ri Eilean Thabhaidh bha'n cuan le beagan buinn,
'Briseadh cùl na Dubhsgeire, ceann.-uidh' nan iomadh tonn:
Mu choinneamh Mol nam Bràithrean bha 'ghaoth air teannadh cruaidh
Bha 'Chàbag chas air fàir gu deas 'si 'coinneachadh nan stuadh

'Siomadh sàr a dh'àraicheadh mu chladaichean ri'r taobh,
A bha air sàl roimh iomadh nàmh, ri seòladh feahd an t-saoghail;
Bha cuid a sheall an treubhantas mar Chalum òg air stiùir,
'Nuair shàbhail e a chompanaich le ealanta is iùil;

'Sann 'n Calabosd a ruagadh e 'sa fhuair e a theagaisg òg,
Seòladh mach o Gheodha 'n Duilig is Eilean beag a' Ghò.
Dh'fhàg sin a làmh cho ealanta 'nuair bha iad ann an càs
Nuair dhiobair balaich Shasuinn bho chd nach togadh seòl air bàt'

Thug e iad gu sàbhailt troimh 'n ghailinn is droch là,
Gus 'n d'ràinig iad an caladh sin far 'n do fhreagair orra bàt.
Ma théid thu 'n diugh a Chalabosd, chan fhaic thu idir suinn,
Chan eil foir air luchd na maradh ann na seòid a sheòl na tuinn.

Ruairidh Moireasdan M.A.

Air ceann na Sgoile 1969-71

“S ann aig deireadh na bliadhna a dh’innseas an t-iasgair a sgeul.”

Seo facal a bh’aig an t-seann duine, agus is cinnteach gu robh e tric r’a chluinntinn air na Lochan.

A nis chan e sgeul bliadhna a th’againn an seo ach sgeul còig fichead dhiùbh, ach mar a rinn an t-iasgair a ghnòthaichean a réiteachadh, na h-uiread gu ’bhuannachd is na h-uiread gu ’chall, ’s ann mar sin a tha luchd-deasachaidh an leabhair seo a’ deanamh cuideachd. Gun teagamh is mór a’ bhuannachd a thug an sgoil gu baile Liurboist troimh nam bliadhnachan is a nis gu bailtean eile ’s a’ choimhearsnachd. Tha e ’na aobhar uail an t-àireamh a fhuair an ciad threòrachadh an slighe an fhoghlaim anns an sgoil, agus a chaidh air adhart gu àrd inbhe a chosnadh dhaibh fhéin agus cliù a chosnadh dha’n sgoil ’s dha’n sgìre, ann an iomadh dreuchd. Ach na deanamaid dì-chuimhne orra-san air an deach an cothrom àicheadh, no air chaochladh aobhar nach b’urrain gabhail ris a’ chothrom ged a bha e ’nan tairgse. Iadsan mar gu’m b’eadh a dh’fhuirich aig an taigh, bha roinn aca-san cuideachd anns na feartan ’s na buadhan a bha an sgoil gu daonnan a’ strì ri chomh-phàirteachadh riù-san a bha an taobh an taobh an staigh de ’ballachan.

’S e mo ghuidhe gum bi gach soirbheachadh a’ leantainn na sgoile anns na bliadhnachan th’air thoiseach, eadar luchd-teagaisg is luchd-ionnsachaidh, ann an saoghal a tha tur eadar-dhealichte ris an t-saoghal a bh’ann an uair a chaidh a dorsan fhosgladh an toiseach, ceud bliadhna air ais. Gum a fada bhios i ’na buannachd is ’na beannachd do mhuinntir Ceann-a-Tuath na Loch, am measg na chuir mi fhìn ’s mo theaghlach seachad iomadh latha suaimhneach, sona.



DID YOU KNOW THAT.....

1. The population of Lochs in 1832 was 2,569, 1,213 males and 1,356 females?
2. Keose Church and Valamus House built in 1796 were the first rural buildings to have lime in their construction?
3. Sixty-six Balallan men left for South America between 1899 and 1937 and 31 of them are buried there?
4. The first pupil enrolled in the new school in Balallan in May 1879 was Angus Martin (Aonghas ’an Taillear) who went to Chile in 1902 and became a successful farmer employing a number of other Lewismen?
5. There is a piece of China in Valtos House garden — soil brought back as ballast?
6. About 1808 thirty-two Lochsmen were shanghaied from the Church at Swordale, Keose, loaded on to a naval boat at Leac nan Gilleain and taken to the Napoleonic War? Only twelve survived the War.

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O chionn ceithir fichead bliadhna
chanadh balaich Raernis:

**Buntàta ròsd’ is glasagan
air Calluinn balaich Chrosaboisd
’S cha robh gràinne siùcar ac’
is ghoid iad ùnnsa air Iain Neill**