

Maighstir Raonall Mac Domhnaill: Priest at Inverbeg, Tarbert and Bracarina from 1780-1840

Given in the public bar (now passed into history) of Morar Hotel, March 2005.

It was the Field Club, set up through Morar Community Council, which revived my interest in what Paul Galbraith, in his book *Blessed Morar*, calls the 'long chapel' at Inverbeg. A year or so ago winter weekends away from the computer were spent removing bracken, some of it six feet high, in order to get a clearer idea of the building. I produced a leaflet, here available again for self-folding, to encourage people to pause while walking between Tarbert and Bracarina. Two Field Club visits were made last summer, one in the rain, and here we are - indoors. I have no slides tonight, although there are three places in the title which could be illustrated in that way. You're local, you can picture them. Inverbeg was the priest's central place for most of his sixty years in Morar. Tarbert is in because he served another chapel there, and Bracarina is Lord Lovat's slated chapel-house where he ended up as an old man.

My attitude to Inverbeg, a year on, is that clearing bracken invites children to walk on walls, destroying them - Paul has expressed concern about that and he's right. Either build the walls up and cement them in place - no need for a roof - and provide a visitor board, or let Inverbeg rest in peace. Whenever anyone came across me there last winter they were astonished to learn that the site was significant - being 'in the middle of nowhere'. I said it was 'the gathering place' for Loch Morar people and beyond. The shelter and the shingle beach make it perfect for that even if there hadn't been a chapel. After the Sunday service, visitors to Inverbeg's little houses lingered over food and drink. Games of shinty no doubt broke out across the burn: Archie MacLellan tells me there were once enough men for a shinty team between Tarbert and Ardnamurach. Maybe Loch Nevis challenged Loch Morar at Inverbeg.

Tonight I plan to bring a man back to life - call it biography - as the Priest of Inverbeg. I told Sue Barrett I wanted his name as 'Maighstir Raonall Mac Domhnaill' on the flyer as an act of vanity. The last talk I gave, to the Gaelic Society of Inverness, was about 'Maighstir Eobhan Mac Echainn'. I put it to them that the priest Ewan MacEachen, who came from Moss of Keppoch in Arisaig, was a neglected pioneer of Gaelic spelling. And - here's the vanity - I did it as a historian, unable to speak the language of the Garden of Eden far less read or write it.

Talking of bringing the priest of Inverbeg back to life takes us to his the grave at the top of the old cemetery. The gravestone is facing the other way, like all priests' graves round here, so that he will be able to confront his people on the Day of Judgement with the Gaelic equivalent of 'Weel ye ken noo!' Since he is at the top he is well placed to confront the whole graveyard. The name on the stone is 'Ronald McDonald', but that proves nothing as it was put there long after his death, which is recorded as 25th December 1840 – not a happy Christmas Day. Archie MacLellan said to me on Sunday he was amazed that there was anything much, far less anything new, to say about the old priest of Morar. I said I'd come across a batch of letters written to him at Inverbeg. Still on the name, they are addressed to the Rev. Mr 'Reginald MacDonell'. All that has survived written by him is the shaky signature to a receipt, written five years before he died, which confirms his English name as 'Reginald Macdonell'. The emphasis in the surname links him with the MacDonalds of Glengarry, not Clanranald. Finally on the name, Paul is a Gaelic-speaker – and writer. He prefers Ranald to Ronald and so do I. The title of Master in the Highlands was given to schoolmasters, scholars and priests, who were never called Father in Scotland in the lifetime of our man. His people spoke about him, down the nose, as Maighstir Raonall Mac Domhnaill.

First, some family history. Nothing is known of Ranald's father except the surname MacDonell. He was born in Glengarry, somewhere above Invergarry, but no one knows where. His mother was a Cameron of Clunes. I went to look for 'Clunis' (there is evidence of two syllables in clergy letters) on Sunday and found a large two-storey mansion, pre-Victorian and white-washed. It looks across a considerable acreage of farm land towards Loch Lochy. Behind is a T-junction, right for cyclists and walkers to Fort Augustus, left to Loch Arkaig a long Scots mile away. In other words Ranald was the length of Loch Arkaig and most of Loch Morar away from this rather grand family house – two boat trips and some walking between the lochs, and as we'll see one of the letters makes reference to the priest's furniture making the journey. The Priest of Inverbeg was a gentleman, well-connected.

Ranald's mother appears in a family tree as the second daughter of 'Old Clunes of the '45'. This Donald Cameron of Clunes was too old to fight, but four sons were at the raising of the standard in Glenfinnan. After the fighting was over Prince Charles Edward, heavily disguised in a servant's clothes, passed Clunes on his way to Morar and Arisaig. Later that summer Clunes's oldest son Sandy brought news of French ships to the Prince and Lochiel in their hiding place on Ben Alder near Dalwhinnie. The same Sandy Cameron, who when you think of it was an uncle to the priest of Inverbeg, got the Prince's party across the

swollen River Lochy in 'an old crank boat' that Clunes had managed to hide from the redcoat patrol, before leading them to the ships at Loch nan Uamh – then off to France and safety. In one of the letters to Inverbeg a friend in Moidart requests Ranald to visit him after the Morar peats are in, and jokes: 'If you don't come then I shall pronounce you a Rebell!' – an obvious reference to the priest's Jacobite background.

Near the end of Maighstir Raonall's life, the priest who lived with him at Bracarina wrote about a Cameron emigration scheme: 'There are preparations in the neighbouring country to this for Van Dieman's Land.' They went to Clunes in the Australian state of Victoria. 'I hear Mr Cameron Clunis who is to send out his son, i.e., Mr Reginald's nephew, has got a list of 200 persons said to be preparing for that Colony. They have sent Mr Reginald, who is in health, the usual allowance of £15.' His mother's family continued to look after him. The family tree describes the priest's mother as 'Marcella m. – M'Donell and had issue.' I will spare you the muddled bits and pieces of family history which need to be studied on the page and from the tree – she may have actually been a grand-daughter of Old Clunes of the Forty-five. Anyone who enjoys that sort of thing is welcome to try making sense of it.

It is enough to say that Marcella Cameron was widowed and married again. According to the Fort Augustus monk Dom Odo Blundell, who wrote *The Catholic Highlands of Scotland* in two volumes, 'His mother was not a Catholic, and was unkind to the boy after her second marriage; but he had the happiness of receiving her into the Church on her death-bed. It is still remembered how at one time there were three ministers in the sick room, but one after the other they went away, and so left the priest alone with his mother, for whose reception into the Church he had so long and so earnestly prayed.' This sounds like one minister too many: the Camerons were Protestant, mostly Episcopalian but also Presbyterian.

Ranald must have spent much of his boyhood under the stronger influence of Catholic MacDonells, maybe grandparents, because an 'unkind' Protestant mother would hardly have encouraged him to become a priest. He was enrolled, as 'Ranald MacDonald', at the Royal Scots College of Valladolid in northern Spain on 23 February 1771. The college is shown in a handout I used last year with the Fort William history group: everything except the picture of the Scots College Rome is relevant. Valladolid was more 'Highland' than Rome, and five other teenagers - all called MacDonald - travelled out with Ranald. The college register shows that he was born in 1754, so aged about fifteen then. When the group of new arrivals were presented to the Bishop of Valladolid for Confirmation, a few months later, word was sent to Scotland that 'Ranald begs to

be informed of his age exactly'. It emerged that only two students knew their dates of birth - no birthday parties for Highland children in these days.

Ranald's entry to the college which had just been moved from Madrid to Valladolid is clearly documented, but not the school he came from – the handout shows that there were a number of Highland 'junior' seminaries, starting with Loch Morar. He must have studied in the short-lived Glenfinnan seminary, which was closed because it turned out to be too social. Apart from boats coming up Loch Shiel, it was on a drove road and close to an inn. Ranald was one of the party taken out to Spain by the Glenfinnan master Allan MacDonald after he had closed the door for the last time. He was a son of Allan Roy MacDonald of Morar, the area's chief landowner. His uncle, the laird's brother, was Bishop Hugh MacDonald about whom a fine book has recently been written.

There was also an English College in Valladolid, and during the early years the Scots wore the same uniform consisting of a black soutane and sash along with a loose gown or *soprana*. A three-cornered hat completed the effect. As you can see from a photograph on the handout, the hat remained in fashion. I like to think that Ranald might have brought some of the uniform back to Morar, as a fellow-student Lachlan MacIntosh did to Glengairn near Balmoral: 'He generally wore a Spanish cloak of dark material. It was fastened at the neck by a silver clasp.' This Lachlan won money in the lottery and went off to Corunna. After nearly dying in the Canary Islands, the prodigal son returned to Valladolid and was allowed back in. Not all students became priests. One of the MacDonalds who came out to Spain with Ranald went for a soldier, and was killed by Napoleon's men while storming the walls of Badajoz in 1812.

Church students were allowed to go into the town, but this happened less often than in the Scots Colleges Rome where they attended university classes. The rectors of Valladolid's Scots and English colleges agreed that the local university was poor, apart from the danger that seminarians would pick up bad habits. The Scots College rector John Geddes (who is shown on the handout) wrote to a bishop in Scotland: 'In so far as I know, there is not a master of Latin in Valladolid who knows so much Latin as little Angus MacDonald here' - a remarkable testimonial to the level of education which could be achieved by a Morar man, although he spent long years in Rome reaching it. Standards in Valladolid had obviously fallen since the expulsion of the Jesuits, who were great educators in many countries. They had formerly run the San Ambrosio house where Ranald lived and studied.

You might be wondering what Geddes had to do with Morocco as shown in his title. Catholicism was illegal in Scotland and bishops were given the names of dioceses in countries no longer Christian. His deputy (who later became mentally ill) accused the rector of lacking strictness, but by the time Ranald

reached the senior classes of philosophy and theology Geddes was able to reassure his superiors in Scotland that the students were 'certainly content and, I venture to say, they have reason to be so: we have got rid of those who gave us any trouble. For almost this twelvemonth past, I do not remember to have heard a disagreeable word in the house.' Conditions were very good by the standards of the times: students all had rooms of their own, whereas back home they would not even have had beds of their own.

Ranald MacDonald must have had fine memories to sustain him in Morar. A backgammon table was sent out on request, and the students asked their rector for 'a Collection of Scots Songs; but if you send them,' Geddes wrote to the bishop in Edinburgh, 'You must see that they be good, or cut out the exceptionable ones' – that is, the rude ones. John Geddes was later greatly admired by Robert Burns, the bawdy poet, as the finest clergyman he knew when they met in Edinburgh. Singing was taught to masters as well as boys, and Geddes said 'even *I* hope to be able to sing a *Pater Noster*.' Just think of the Lord's Prayer being sung in Latin under the heather thatch at Inverbeg!

Ranald worked a croft there, and he learned something about it in Spain. Extra spades were requested for the Valladolid students because 'one is rather insufficient for a dozen of gardeners.' (If I dare risk going off the point, much later Lord Lovat's factor told a government commission that the Morar people had to be shown how to use spades: he said nothing about the native bent wooden version which was like the *cas chrom* but sturdier.) The students got pocket money at Valladolid, despite objections from bishops in Scotland. Some bought books, others bought canaries, carpentry tools and snuff.

Before returning with Ranald from Spain to Scotland, let's think further about what he left behind – this time in terms of buildings. The college chapel was built in the baroque style with a high domed ceiling, plastered and painted, with elaborately twisted pillars above the altar. Dreams of Spanish grandeur were given a final cause to linger in the young man's mind when he was ordained as a priest in July 1780. The ceremony took place in the old walled city of Segovia – Father Andrew Barrett knows it well - half way between Valladolid and Madrid. The ceremony took place in the Cathedral of San Ildefonso de la Granja, one of Spain's finest Gothic buildings. Founded in the early sixteenth century, the building dedicated to an Iberian saint was hundreds of years in the building. It had only been completed three years before and was splendid in its fresh paint and ecclesiastical finery.

Ranald came home in the autumn. There was no chapel or house for him in Morar, as the one on Eilean Bàn had been destroyed after Culloden. Ranald's predecessor was based at Arisaig and had previously served the whole area from

a base on the other side of Loch Nevis. Odo Blundell the Fort Augustus historian who took delight in consulting local traditions, wrote: 'Mr Reginald M'Donell had no house of his own, but according to the custom of the time, stayed one week in one house, a second week in another, and so on, from the end of Loch Nevis to Mallaig.' The itinerant style of priesthood was also followed by the Rev. Ewen MacEachen who returned to Arisaig from Spain in 1800. According to a report of 1783, just after his own return from Spain, Maighstir Raonall had 460 Catholics in North Morar, 250 in South Morar (as far as Swansletter in the Arisaig direction) and 46 on Loch Arkaig side. It may be that some of the MacMillans who lived there were kin to his stepfather: the family tree shows that Marcella Cameron, possibly his mother, married a MacMillan.

Paul Galbraith says in *Blessed Morar*: 'The building itself is of crude dry-stone construction, and was thatched. There is evidence also of several dwellings having existed close by the burn flowing down from the hills; and the marks of lazy-bed cultivation on the surrounding flat ground was worked in that vicinity. The priest himself could have tilled some of the land.' Boulton's 1834 estate map (for Lord Lovat) shows four or five buildings inland from the rectangle of the chapel. My leaflet reproduces this to show two patches of arable land separated by the promontory's 2 acres 3 rods and 6 perches of moor providing meagre pasture for a few cows. Above the bridle path in course of being constructed to Tarbert a new plantation is described as seven acres of 'oak stools'.

Paul again: 'The church main building has some additional "rooms" attached to it; and these may have provided accommodation for the priest himself, and whatever animals he may have possessed. It is situated in a most beautiful location, at the head of a small bay – Bagh Inbhir-Beag, which would have provided ideal shelter and ease of landing for boats bringing people from the outlying hamlets on the shores of Loch Morar.' The 'inver' is small river mouth. Other church-goers crossed the isthmus or tairbeart from the shores of Loch Nevis, although during Ranald's time a chapel was built for them as well. Much could be said about Tarbert, the fishing port which gave way to Mallaig, but here we are only concerned with the fact that every third Sunday or so Ranald went there to say Mass.

According to my amateurish judgement on the archaeology of Inverbeg, it looks as though large stones were removed from the next stretch to the east and used in the construction of the 'long chapel'. The floor, and some of the ground outside on the landward side, is paved with small stones which are different from the pebbles on the beach. There are no foundations. As for the 'rooms' mentioned by Paul, neither they nor the former dwellings are shown on the OS six-inch map surveyed in 1873, where the former chapel is described as a sheepfold. By the time of the updated 1901 map the structure has become

distinctly L-shaped, suggesting that stones from the former dwellings were used to construct a better sheep fank. I believe that the priest lived in one of these dwellings before he moved - around 1812 as I've recently learned from a letter - nearer to what became the chapel-house of Bracarina. The letter makes reference to furniture being brought from the head of Loch Morar to 'Poverty Hall'. The writer Alexander Chisholm was a very rich kelp merchant whose tone is jocular - that of a friend - and he goes on to call the priest's new house the 'Hall of Shills and Crowdie' which I take to mean modest comfort. At any rate for another twenty years Maighstir Raonall walked back to Inverbeg on Sundays.

Regarding these recently discovered letters, once again the Fort William handout is helpful for its two references to Fr Allan MacDonald. The student photo shows that he died on the island of Eriskay in 1905. Other students with local connections are shown. At the top left corner it is stated that Father Allan came from Fort William, that he did not experience old age, and that he was a folklorist of the Outer Hebrides. I thought of making up a third handout but he is not the subject of tonight's talk, just a provider of letters. I can show you the title-page of John Lorne Campbell's 1954 book about him, and also a photo with a group of visitors to Eriskay. The lady next to Father Allan is Ada Goodrich Freer, who was interested in Second Sight - so interested that she published a book about it although, like me she scarcely knew a word of Gaelic. She was later fiercely attacked in print by John Lorne Campbell for claiming Father Allan's work as her own.

Off the point, but interesting, Father Allan's folklore-collecting brought him to Morar in November 1896, and he spoke with Chirsty MacDougall, a sixty-six year-old lady who lived below Deirdre's croft at No. 3 Bracara - the house called Ardmorar. Her son Alasdair or Alexander had been Father Allan's predecessor as priest of Eriskay before moving to Benbecula. He was a priest and piper, and two photos of him (one at Bracara) have found their way into books. Mrs MacDougall gave Father Allan local superstitions, and there is a thought for neighbours up the hill in one of them: 'When going to a well or stream for water, the wash or rinsing water of the pails should not be thrown out on one's own land or croft.' Chuck it over the dyke! Morar people believed that 'No cat should be allowed to drink the milk of a cow after calving till a dog has taken some first:' a semi-rational explanation follows. These two are linked by 'If there be a little milk in the bottom of a pail it should not be thrown out on stones or rocks but on grass, because the milk comes from the grass.'

When I'm not pursuing the sedentary life of a historian, I pull up dockens as well as bracken by the roots, so I was interested to learn that the stalks of docken grew long and strong in these days too: 'A cow should not be struck or driven

with cuiseag ruadh or docken.’ This ties in with folklore about the summer sheiling time high up on the common grazing: ‘It is believed that the rod has a virtue to protect the cattle. The switch or staff that herds use when driving cattle to the hill pasture should be thrown after the cattle and left with them when the herdsman turns home.’ Finally from 1896, since I’ve recently told STV and Grampian much the same thing, I am obviously pleased with what Father Allan wrote down after visiting his friend’s mother in Bracara: ‘The monster called “Mòrag” that is said to live in Loch Morar has many eye-witnesses to test to its actual existence. . . [but] I had no opportunity of questioning them at first hand.’

Opportunity struck in another way. While he was staying in the Lovat chapel-house at Beoraidmore – Father Joe’s place - as the guest of Father Donald McLellan his fellow-student at Valladolid, Father Allan MacDonald came across letters written to the Rev. Mr Reginald MacDonell. A year later, having borrowed them for winter evenings in Eriskay, he wrote in his diary for January 1898: ‘Copied some letters about a century old that were sent to old Fr Reginald McDonald in Morar. I find them interesting. It seems there was quite a pile of them at Morar Chapel House Bracara but they were not appreciated in time.’ Think of the lost history of Morar which that implies! He came away with eight letters which were later passed on to the bishop’s house in Oban. From there they came to the Scottish Catholic Archives in Edinburgh, where anyone can consult them. I have a copy of one letter sent from the only priest to the north of him, at Dornie, in Kintail, and copies of the eight as written out by Father Allan. Letters in the Archives are catalogued by sender, so if he hadn’t spent these January evenings in Eriskay it would have been very hard to find them.

I’ve picked out the most interesting points. The first letter, dated 28 August 1794 when Britain was at war with France, was written by Alexander MacDonald from Kinchreggan – I wonder how many know that was the old name for . . . Inverailort. Otherwise known as Banker MacDonald, he funded the cattle trade from another house at Callendar. He was a Deputy Lieutenant of Inverness-shire, appointed after Scotland’s Catholics were given legal recognition by Act of Parliament in the previous summer of 1793. As I once pointed out in *West Word*, the local gentry met for dinner at Arisaig to express their loyalty to the British crown, delighted that they would be able to accept officers’ commissions in the British army without lying about their religion or giving it up. In his letter from Inverailort MacDonald wanted the priest at Inverbeg to follow the example of Protestant ministers in proclaiming the willingness of their congregations to ‘act in aid of the civill authority when called upon.’ He added a strong postscript: ‘I am sorry to find that some of the Lower Class are impressed with the foolish idea that this is more to bring them into effectual Military Service, and it’s very

requisite this absurd notion should be done away with.' Three years later conscription was introduced, provoking militia riots in various parts of Scotland.

A letter came four years later from the latest Highland seminary at Samalaman in Moidart – again the handout is useful in showing this building near Genuig Hall, much as it is today. If you can decipher the hand-writing it shows different parts being added. The message to Ranald at Inverbeg from a priest-professor at Samalaman was that there was probably no room for a local lad who wished to pursue his education there. This was the young brother – unnamed - of Angus Gillis who farmed at Ardnamurach near Tarbert. The Gillises claimed to be the oldest inhabitants of Morar before MacDonald gentlemen, related to the clan chief, came in. The suggestion here seems to be that the Ardnamurach crofter was getting above himself. The bishop (who lived at Samalaman) had already 'given a refusal to some who would look for an equal right with a Gillis.' The MacDonalds of Finiskaig, who as tacksmen had more than a croft at the head of Loch Nevis, later gave money to enlarge the Tarbert chapel. The letter emphasized that if there did turn out to be room for a Gillis, Mr Reginald would have to vouch for 'good conduct and behaviour in the boy'. The annual cost, 'no less than ten pounds', was also charged for gentlemen's sons at the other bishop's seminary in Glenlivet. There were schools in Inverness, of course, but Angus Gillis would know 'how liable a pliant youth is to be corrupted and imbibe vice.'

We stay with seminaries because the next letter of 10 March 1804 came from the island of Lismore near Oban. In it Bishop John Chisholm, again showing a snobbish tendency, made a point of praising young Glenaladale (who had been a guest at the new seminary) as a 'most promising young boy'. Alexander MacDonald Glenaladale went on to become a 'Regency rake', like Beau Brummel, along with the Eton-educated Reginald George MacDonald of Clanranald. These two made a drunken tour of the Highlands and Outer Hebrides which resulted in a bastard son for Glenaladale. He received a stern episcopal warning from Lismore about the peril to his immortal soul, and died a few months later - while still young - after erecting the Glenfinnan monument.

An 1804 reply by Bishop Chisholm makes clear what Mr Reginald had said in his letter: 'Your moral observation seems to imply my being at greater distance than I usually am, [but I] am more accessible here to the world than before where I have formerly been in Moydart, nor am I at such a distance from you but you can see when the spiritual concerns of your flock will allow the Pastor to take a little range, during which time a Pastor in the vicinity may have the charge.' In other words the priest of Arisaig or possibly Knoydart could 'supply'. The bishop seemed to confirm his priest's complaint, however, by saying that he could not visit Morar at Easter. He makes dark, unexplained

reference to a 'horrid affair' at Mallaig, which was then Mallaigveg, and ends the letter by keeping the Inverbeg priest in touch with the great world: 'We are told the King is not compos and that a regency must take place' – I'm sure you know about Mad King George.

I'll pass the next letter round rather than discuss it. It was written in November of that same year by Christopher MacRae, priest of Kintail, announcing a small legacy and complaining about his isolation on the edge of the Catholic Highlands – he hasn't seen another priest in more than a year. An 1808 letter from Bishop Chisholm at Lismore doesn't have much local interest but makes reference to the Pope's territories in Italy being occupied by Napoleon's troops: 'It is a melancholy sight to see the Vicar of Christ under the feet of the vicar of Hell.'

Four months later another priest called Ranald MacDonald writes to Inverbeg from Bornish in South Uist, happy that the French occupation of Spain is being resisted: 'You will be growing proud of the achievements of your old friends the Spaniards. I heartily wish them success, but woe to them if they are conquered after all by Buonaparte. He will think no punishment this side of Hell sufficient for them, nor shall I if they relent but with their breath.' On a local topic, sheep-farming was beginning to take over the Highlands, and MacDonald's family at Fersit, east of Roybridge, were involved. However he rejoiced at its apparent 'downfall' in what must have been a bad year for sheep losses. MacDonald congratulated his Inverbeg colleague for having been promoted to the position of Administrator – one of the bishop's advisers. Ranald Macdonald became bishop himself at Lismore twelve years later, so it is ironic that he says the best thing about Uist is not having to go to meetings. Perhaps clergy meetings were less interesting than those of the Morar Community Council.

Clergy letters from a later period provide an impression of Ranald MacDonald's final years. At a time when whisky was routinely taken by hard-worked priests as well as people, the assistant priest at Bracarina - Coll MacColl, no abstainer, and 'a great boy for the fiddle' - ended a letter of 25 May 1838 with a particular request to Bishop Andrew Scott who was based a paddle-steamer's journey away at Greenock: 'I hope you will relieve me from the obligation of keeping spirits constantly in the house on acct. of Mr R^d & lessen the board by £3 instead of it. He can if he likes buy it for himself. He is in the usual health.' As a letter of 10 July shows, MacColl was partly concerned about his own position, since every mission priest was supported by an annual 'quota'. In this case it had been channeled through the area's leading Catholic layman:

'Mr McDonald Glenalladale sent me inclosed £19 3s. without mentioning anything about the division of it, & as Mr Reginald and I are near about square at

last term of Whitsunday I have left the letter containing the money with Mr R himself until we have the honor of seeing your Lord^p or your advice in respect to it. I must be however under the necessity of borrowing a part of it, if it belongs all to Mr R.' As already noted, Ranald MacDonald received an additional £15 allowance from his nephew of Clunes. Funds were also distributed by William McIntosh, Scott's vicar general (or deputy) at Arisaig, as shown on 30 April 1839: 'As I am still in Dr Murdoch's debts I will pay, if you choose, Mr Coll, Mr Anthony and Mr Reginald's quotas amounting to £13.' Dr John Murdoch was Scott's coadjutor bishop based in Glasgow, and Anthony MacDonald served Eigg and Canna.

Coll MacColl's main value to the mission lay in visiting homes now that Mr Reginald was no longer fit for journeys. Travelling with his clerk, MacColl brought baptism to children as far away as Loch Quoich and often conducted weddings in the homes of the people. McIntosh at Arisaig took an interest in a one which took place at Swansletter on the edge of his mission. The Moidart priest Ranald Rankin had been supplying and was responsible for banns. On 30 July 1838 McIntosh wrote: 'When I was in Barra, a couple were proclaimed at Arisaig by Mr Rankin the Sunday before I came home, and he refused to marry them till I would return and proclaim them a second time at least; but my good people [ironic?] set off the Tuesday following and got married by Mr Ranald Morar without any line from Mr Rankin that no opposition had been offered. I do not call in question the validity of the marriage, owing to his dotage, yet I have some doubts whether he heard their confessions.'

Dotage means mental and physical decay. In the new Bracarina chapel-house (which kept out the rain better than other houses in the district, as Coll MacColl wrote feelingly in the middle of a wet summer) the old priest had to be watched. There was no shortage of carers, for the first government census of 1841 named three female servants in the house as well as Coll's sister Isabella. There were risks. The chimney and the hearth, where peat was burned, were an advance on traditional fires in the centre of the room, with smoke finding its way out through the roof trees, but fireguards had still to come to Morar. McIntosh passed on the bad news on 10 November 1840: 'Poor Mr Ranald fell into the fire two days ago and burned his hands severely and cut his face, so that he is in a dangerous way. Mr McColl sent for Dr McCallum this afternoon [probably from Skye] and I am going to see him tomorrow.' On 29 November the old man was 'recovering though still confined to his bed,' but on Christmas Day 1840 Ranald MacDonald died at the age of eighty-six.

Paul Galbraith again: 'His grave is in the corner of Cille-Chuimein cemetery in Morar, in the corner nearest to Mallaig. The cross which was erected in his memory – obviously long after his death – became the pattern for such crosses on

the graves of other priests buried in the same graveyard.' It takes the form of a low sandstone monument, its cross contained within a circle. This is reminiscent of the Celtic Cross associated with St Cumin, Columba's biographer, who brought Christianity from Iona. Like all the other priests whose remains lie here, his gravestone faces those of the people – a local custom looking forward to their first confrontation on the Day of Judgement. Meanwhile there have been 'stories among the old people of Morar about miracles worked by him, and angelic lights seen round his grave.'

Afterthoughts

The wedding of Charles MacLean, Lettermorar, and Anne MacLellan on 28 June 1834 was conducted by the Rev. Ranald MacDonald. Coll MacColl recorded the details. Charles' wife Anne MacLellan of Bourblach, on the north side of Morar Bay, was the second youngest of ten children born to Captain Allan MacLellan and Isabella MacDonald. The family seems to have lived on both sides of the Sound of Sleat, with the 'pretty little house' of Gillean rented from the MacDonalds of Sleat by MacLeans, MacDonalds and MacLellans in turn. Flora MacLellan was married from Gillean in 1840, the ceremony being held at the Kinlochailort home of her husband, and Anne's own wedding took place at Gillean on the evidence of her husband's death certificate. Charles MacLean was a major tenant who had many thousand acres of pasture in South Morar. His son Allan, who was born at Lettermorar in 1839, went with the rest of the family to Gippsland in what became Australia's state of Victoria. A brother had gone ahead and wrote a pioneer novel about the area. Allan MacLean went into politics to represent the sheep-faring interest and became Premier of Victoria, and then a cabinet-minister in the Australian government at Canberra. As noted in *Tales of the Morar Highlands*, the tup park wall at Lettermorar which was made of stones from the houses of Rhetland (to the west of it) provides a visible symbol of the new large-scale pastoral farming.

Another RMcD wedding - On 11 July 1833 'were married at Buarplach by the Revd. Reginald MacDonell, Mr. Donald MacDonald Mercht. Arisaig and Miss Margaret MacLellan daur. to Captain MacLellan Buarplach.'