

## HISTORY OF THE GAELIC SOCIETY OF INVERNESS FROM 1871–1971

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A few years earlier, a Glenurquhart schoolboy, William MacKay, had had a similar urge. with regard to the folk-lore of his own district — and he, now in training as a solicitor — in Inverness, wrote in support of Mr. Campbell's injunction a letter which appeared in *The Courier* of 15th December of the same year. A schoolboy from Raining's School, William MacKenzie, later of the Crofters' Commission, made up his mind to visit Mr. MacKay. These two became firm friends — both feeling strongly the need to save the Gaelic language and literature from passing into complete oblivion. The idea of founding a Gaelic Society in Inverness occurred to both, and they decided to start a newspaper correspondence on the subject.

The first letter from Mr. MacKenzie, signed "U. MacC," appeared in *The Courier* in May, 1871. This was answered by Mr. MacKay, signed "Mealfourvonie." Other letters subsequently appeared from Mr. MacKenzie, Schoolmaster, Maryburgh — "Caberfeidh," Mr. Alex. MacKenzie — "Clachnacuddin," and others.

The result of this correspondence was that Mr. MacKay inserted a Gaelic advertisement in a few Inverness papers inviting those favourable to the idea to meet on the evening of 4th September, 1871, and issued circulars to those thought to be particularly interested.

Thirty-five gentlemen attended the meeting — and thus the Gaelic Society of Inverness came into being.

There were many who poured scorn on the whole idea, laughing it off as the brainwave of a few youngish idealists who would never bring their scheme to fruition. A burning love for the Highland way of life, its language, music and tradition, and a feeling of pique that information on matters Highland could only be got from The Gaelic Society of London, which had been founded in 1777, impelled the pioneers to push on with their task and institute a worthwhile Gaelic Society in Inverness, the capital of the Highlands.

How successful their effort was can best be judged by scanning the pages of a few of the Society's *Transactions*, where the names of Highland Chiefs, Highland politicians, Highland literary pundits, poets, musicians, soldiers, sailors and scholars abound. In later volumes one finds the names of members of our Royal families, who showed their appreciation of the Society's work in no small measure.

It was particularly lucky for the future of the Society that one of the founders was William MacKay, later to become Dr. William MacKay, an honour gained for his research into Highland history. One of his books *Urquhart and Glenmoriston* — a model parish history — is recognised the world over as a standard work on these parts. Here was a man who could mount a platform and sing a Gaelic song deliver a witty or learned speech in Gaelic or English write original articles on endless Highland subjects — and act as a stimulating secretary to almost any organisation.

Three more preliminary meetings set the stage for the launching of the Society on 19th October, when the Rev. A. D. MacKenzie of the Free Church, Killmorack, delivered an engrossing lecture to a large and enthusiastic audience. The hall was tastefully decorated for the occasion with a royal stag's head as centrepiece the walls hung with tartans lent from Clachnacuddin House, interspersed with bunches of deer grass taken from the Monadhliath Mountains. The meeting closed with the singing of "God Save the Queen" in Gaelic, translated by Mr. Angus MacDonald, a native of Glenurquhart, the bard to the Society.

The Society held meetings weekly from the beginning of October to the end of March and fortnightly for the remainder of the year — the summer months — a programme which was adhered to for several years.

The first annual Assembly was held in the Music Hall on 11th July, 1872 — the eve of the Wool Market, at which Cluny MacPherson, Chief of Clan Chattan, whose Gaelic was as good as his English, was Chief. Three pipers played a welcome for the thousand strong audience at the entrance to the hall, whilst a distinguished company took their places on the platform. Amongst these were Professor Blackie, Professor of Greek at Edinburgh University, and the Rev. Alexander Stewart ("Nether Lochaber"), who in a witty and erudite speech very successfully appealed to all Highlanders to support the movement. At half-time light refreshments were handed round, and then the meeting was addressed by Professor Blackie, and here again one meets a man who lent lustre to the cause and inspired his audience with a rare enthusiasm.

At this time Professor Blackie was fighting to have a Celtic chair installed in Edinburgh also, and the Inverness Gaelic Society willingly joined with him in this enterprise. The result was a widening of the Society's interests, and a linking up on their part with other Celtic societies which were being formed in various Scottish towns. At the end of the first year there were one hundred and eighty-two members on the roll, and a balance in favour of the Society of about £20.

Lucky again was the Society in having that worthy son of Dochgarroch, so well known for his research into, Highland history, Charles Fraser Mackintosh, on their roll. When representing Inverness as its Liberal Member, being, the only Gaelic speaker in the House, he became the mouthpiece of our Highland small tenantry in the capital. Known as "The Member for the Highlands," Fraser Mackintosh did more in Parliament to help the ordinary Highland people than any other of his time. He urged the Society to popularise Gaelic literature and the history of the Highlands; to look after Culloden battlefield; to erect monuments and memorial tablets to our distinguished Highlanders, and invest money made by Highlanders in the Highlands.

Add to these such pundits as Dr. Carruthers; Dr. Mackenzie of Eileanach, the town's provost, Mr. Alex. MacKenzie (Clach), Mr. Charles MacKay, Drummond. Rev. Alexander MacGregor, indefatigable collector of Highland verse, Mr. James Barron, Courier Office, Mr. John Mackintosh, Rector of the old Academy. Mr. Colin Chisholm, who in 1882 was made an honorary chieftain, and eventually referred to as "the father of the Society", Mr. Lachlan MacBean, Kiltarlity, first member of the Society, who published along with other valuable works Songs and Hymns of the Scottish Gael, a Gaelic Psalmody, and The Spiritual Songs of Dugald Buchanan, and Sheriff Campbell,

and one readily agrees with Fraser Mackintosh that there was only one thing wanting to the Society first-class and that was a few lady members.

At the exceptionally successful fifth Assembly of the Society, whose chief that year was Professor Blackie, it was announced that there were now 390 members — quite a few of whom were ladies. One of these was Mary MacKellar, the Gaelic poetess. Born Mary Cameron, in Fort William, she early imbibed the lore of her country. John MacKellar, whom she married, was captain and joint owner of a coasting vessel, and in his company she visited many places throughout Europe, studying the poetry and folk-lore of the Continent. She was installed as bardess in 1876 — an honour she held until her death in 1890. Chosen by Queen Victoria to translate into Gaelic her *Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highlands*, she was later granted a pension from the Civil List for her work.

At this meeting it was announced that Queen Victoria had given £200 towards the establishing of a Celtic chair in Edinburgh University.

By this time, too, the teaching of Gaelic in rural Highland schools was begun — though treated only as an extra subject and taught after school hours. In 1877 a competition was held at Druninadrochit, in which four schools, Drumnadrochit, Blairbeg, Balnain and Invermoriston, were represented. The sole competitor from Glenmoriston was my father, who walked off with four prizes — and who later became an honorary chieftain of the Society. With him he brought a valuable heritage of Gaelic song, lore and literature — part of which he had inherited from his mother, who, in 1863, had published the poems of Archibald Grant, the Glenmoriston bard. It is interesting here to note how many of the Society's most outstanding members came from the Loch Ness-side district.

The year 1878 saw the Great Celtic Demonstration in Inverness. It was decided to recognise, publicly, the services rendered to Highland education by Fraser Mackintosh, by presenting him with an address and entertaining him at a public dinner. Other Highland societies were invited to co-operate and many sent representatives to Inverness. The result was a fresh impetus for the Gaelic cause, and a renewed determination to have Gaelic taught in all Highland schools — the expenses to be met from school rates. A Celtic Federation was proposed, by which all the Celtic societies of the country could acquire greater strength.

The chairman at the eighth annual dinner was a fervid Highlander, Mr. Lachlan MacDonald of Skeabost — a land owner steeped in Highland lore and music. outstanding for his extreme generosity towards his tenants, and father of Mr. Somerled MacDonald, champion amateur piper of Britain and distinguished artist, whose portrait of Professor Blackie is known to most. The Chief was the Rev. Thomas MacLauchlan, LLD, Moderator of the Free Church — of Abriachan stock — a distinguished Celtic scholar who had translated *The Book of the Dean of Lismore* in 1862.

In 1881 the rumoured proposal by the War Office to change the distinctive tartans of the Highland Regiments was brought to the notice of the Society's members. An immediate strong protest from the Society won the day for the tartans.

About this time, too, the Society took an active part in the movement to have a Gaelic census incorporated in the census of 1881. This was granted but was not altogether satisfactory and the Society insisted that the total number of Gaelic speakers in Scotland was around 300,000 as against the official number of 231,594. This preceded and strengthened a further demand for more time to be allowed for the teaching of Gaelic in schools; a grant was given for this purpose and Gaelic placed in the schedule of specific subjects.

A colourful member of the Society, John Murdoch, the acknowledged apostle of land reform, was now making his impetus felt in the Highlands. Though born in Nairnshire, this lively exciseman was by education and upbringing an Islay man, and brought the emotions gained there to his advocacy of the cause of the Highland people with regard to their native soil. To further this appeal he ran a newspaper, *The Highlander*, for eight years, of which the first fruit was the Crofter's Act. In 1883 he gave valuable evidence before the Highland Commission, of which Lord Napier was chairman. In this William MacKay backed him up — appealing to the Society to collect all traditional evidence which showed that the land in the Highlands was considered to belong to the crofters who worked it. He also suggested that a subscription should be raised to help the crofters of the Western Isles whose crops had suffered disaster from the bad weather conditions of the year, and to try to educate these crofters from dividing up their tiny crofts amongst their families on marriage — rather was it wise for the young to seek new land for themselves, leaving the original crofts intact with their parents.

In all this these two were strongly supported by Mr. MacKay's father-in-law, John MacKay, Hereford — a staunch member of the Society. This gentleman also gave valuable evidence before the Napier Crofters' Commission, proving himself to be as important to the improvement of Highland life as Fraser Mackintosh. Born in Rogart, Sutherland, he did valuable work on the place names and history of his birthplace; endowed bursaries for the study of Gaelic, and donated several valuable books which later helped to found the Society's library.

Interested in this movement, too, was William MacKenzie, secretary of the Society from 1876–1886, who later became secretary of the Crofters' Commission. *The Catechism of the Crofter* by Dr. MacKenzie, Eileanach, highlighted the importance of light industry for the survival, economically, of the Highlands, and Provost MacAndrew made a strong appeal for consideration of this subject at one of the Society's dinners.

During this period Gaelic classes had been held in Raining's School, for which 140 people were enrolled. Though suffering from a lack of teachers this enterprise was extremely successful, being in the very capable hands of Alex. MacBain, MA, rector of the school. and a Gaelic scholar of note. Born in Badenoch in 1855, and educated there, he for a time acted in the school as a teacher. When nineteen years old he entered Aberdeen Grammar School, and from there progressed to King's College where he was acknowledged as an outstanding student. In 1881 he was appointed to the rectorship of Raining's School, where he taught for thirteen years, being transferred later to the High School. In 1882, as a member of the Society, he was asked to propose the toast of "The Language and Literature of the Gael." In proposing the toast he revealed his attitude towards Gaelic literature, which was something entirely new and unexpected, declaring as it did that it was left for the science of language, in the hands of the Germans to rescue the Gael and his tongue from the beleaguered position it held and award it full cousinship with the best races in Europe. In 1901 his work in Celtic philosophy, history and literature won him the degree of LLD, and in 1905 he became the recipient of a Civil List pension.

Dr. MacBain's principal works consist of articles on 'The Book of Deer', 'Ptolemy's Geography', 'The Norse Element in Highland Place-names: Badenoch History and Place-names' and 'Celtic Burial.' In addition to these he edited *Skene's History of the Highlands*, to which he added a valuable excursus embodying his own views regarding many of Skene's tenets. Along with the Rev. John Kennedy he brought out *Reliquiae Celticae*, a work of great value begun by that other pioneer Celtic scholar and native of Badenoch, the Rev. Alexander Caffieron of Brodick. His crowning work, however, was his well-known *Etymological Gaelic Dictionary*.

In 1888 another eminent Gaelic scholar and research worker, Professor Donald MacKinnon, a native of Colonsay, was appointed to the Celtic chair in Edinburgh. Though this appointment was warmly received on account of his valued contributions to Gaelic literature, disappointment was felt that the teaching of Gaelic in schools was making but slow progress. Again and again Dr. Alex. MacBain implored the authorities to remedy this state of affairs — but with little success — for there were very, very few teachers to be found capable of imparting Gaelic to the young. Equally disappointing was the response to The MacKintosh of MacKintosh's offer of a £10 prize for the best essay on "The Social Progress of the Highlands since 1800." At first there were no competitors — but eventually a very few sent in scripts, and the prize was awarded to Mr. A. Poison, Dunbeath.

When the Society gained its majority in 1892 it became plain to all concerned that during these twenty years of its existence the Highlands had been passing through a transition period. Railway lines, running like healthy veins into the towns and villages, were bringing the life-blood of trade to these areas and trade was now the life-blood of the nation. Piers and harbours were being built to link up with the railways and life in general was moving at a faster pace. Young Highlanders must be

encouraged to join the Army, the Civil Service, to widen their approach to life, and cease depending solely on crofting and fishing for their livelihood. The Society, it was felt, over these years had fostered a lively spirit of brotherhood throughout the Highlands, a success due largely to its complete lack of political interests, and its sincere desire to further the Highland way of life. The *Transactions of the Society* were meeting the keen interest in Celtic literature which now pervaded the entire world.

To stimulate greater interest in Gaelic literature it was now decided to collect a library for the Society. Members had already gifted valuable volumes of old Gaelic literature, and there were also many original works from the members themselves, including *The Clan Battle at Perth* by Mr. A. M. Shaw; *Philologic Uses of the Celtic Tongue* by Professor Geddes; *Irish Pedigrees* by O'Hart; *Hebrew-Celtic Affinity* by Dr. Stratton; *Celtic Gleanings* and *Early Scottish Church* by Rev. Dr. Thomas MacLauchlan; *Poems and Songs* by Mary MacKellar; *A Genealogical Account of the Highland Families of Shaw* and *A History of the Clan Chattan* by A. Mackintosh Shaw; *Land Statistics of Inverness, Ross and Cromarty in 1871* by H. C. Fraser. *Clarsach an Doire* by Neil MacLeod; *Guide to Sutherlandshire* by Hew Morrison; *Eachdraidh na h-Alba* by A. Mac Coinnich; *John Laurie, an Eccentric Sutherland Dornnic* by D. W. Kemp; *History of Urquhart and Glenmoriston* by William MacKay; *History of the MacKenzies* by Alex Mackenzie; *Pictish Inscriptions* by C. B. Nicolson; *Presbytery Records of Inverness and Dingwall* edited by William MacKay, and *Coinneach is Coille* by Alex. MacDonald.

The passing years had taken many of the early stalwarts — Professor Blackie, Charles Fraser Mackintosh, Sheriff Nicolson, Colin Chisholm, Alexander MacKenzie “Silver-wells,” Duncan MacIntosh, secretary; John Murdoch, and Charles Ferguson a gardener by profession, who was extremely able and well informed about Highland lore. In the distance the drums of the South African War were beginning to roll — a call to arms which was to deprive the Society of many of its members. Lord Lovat raised a regiment for the campaign; the famous 79th or Camerons went into action almost immediately, to be followed by the Highland Brigade, the Seaforth Highlanders, and the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

As if to compensate, however, a new generation, embodying a first-class family unit consisting of Mr. W. J. Watson — (later Professor of Celtic Languages at the University of Edinburgh), his father-in-law Dr. Carinichael, and his talented daughter, wife of Mr. Watson, took over and carried on the work. At the annual dinner Mr. Watson paid tribute to the gallantry of the Highland Regiments — and the toast of the Society became “Tir nam Beann nan, Gleann’s nan Gaisgeach.”

Again, however, death claimed a heavy percentage of loyal members — Dr. Alex. MacBain, at the early age of fifty-two; Mr. John MacKay, Hereford, the Rev. John MadRury, Snizort, a writer of impeccable Gaelic prose.

Dr. Carmichael, Captain Wimberley, and that very staunch supporter, Queen Victoria. As a token of respect for the memory of these people no annual dinner was held in 1900.

Towards the end of the next decade musical programmes, were introduced which enlivened the annual dinners and gave great pleasure to all who heard them. At these Mod medallists gave of their best. Who can ever forget the beautiful singing of Rory MacLeod, who had begun his musical career under the auspices of the Society — and his pawky stories of Highland folk; the pianoforte playing of Miss Chrissie Fraser, and my own sister Katharine; the violin playing of Mr. Andrew MacKintosh, whose history of the strathspey brought out all that was best in the technique of this dance; the singing of Miss Kate Fraser, a native of Glenurquhart and first woman in the Highlands to have her voice recorded for the phonograph of Jessie. MacLachlan and Miss Watt, and the stirring strains of the Strathspey and Reel Society under the leadership of Mr. Alexander Grant?

The Gaelic inheritance was now proving to be a rich one, and a bright star was beginning to illumine the horizon, for Aberdeen University agreed to allow Gaelic as an entrance subject in Arts. Several members of the Society were being honoured for the excellence of their work. In 1910 Mr. Watson had the degree of LLD conferred upon him by Aberdeen University. Born in Easter Ross in 1865, he had taken first class honours in Classics at Aberdeen University, and was awarded the Gold Medal for the best Latin scholar of the session. From Aberdeen he went to Oxford, and after teaching for three years in Glasgow was: appointed Rector of the Royal Academy, Inverness, during which period he influenced Highland education considerably. In 1914 he was appointed Professor of Celtic Languages, Literature and Antiquities in Edinburgh University.

In the fields of Celtic literature and philology he did work of the highest value. His Place Names of Ross and Cormarty is regarded as beyond criticism. Celtic periodicals and the transactions of Antiquarian Societies were enriched by his scholarly contributions. The maintenance of Gaelic as a spoken language; the provision, of Gaelic text-books, the moulding of public opinion in sympathy with the work of Celtic enthusiasts — these were the things he worked for.

The Gaelic Society of Canada conferred the diploma of Fellow of its Society (FGSC) on the Rev. A. Maclean Sinclair, a native of Nova Scotia, for the valuable work to his credit, including his Magnum Opus — the history of the Clan MacLean, *The Clan Gillean*.

The Rev. Thomas Sinton, minister of the parish of Dores, avid collector of Gaelic verse and lore, and author of *The Poetry of Badenoch*, was awarded the degree of DD by St. Andrews University, whilst, in 1914, Mr. William MacKay received the degree of LLD from the University of Aberdeen.

The 1914–18 War again disrupted activities, taking a heavy toll of many useful members, amongst whom were Captain D. F. Mackenzie, secretary; Colonel Alex. Fraser, the Earl of Seafield, Captain Ronald MacDonald, Portree, and Major Iain MacKay, elder son of Dr. William MacKay. Yet as if to balance things, the pace of living was quickening and new interests were springing up in all directions. King George V honoured the Society by presenting it with a gift — Queen Victoria’s *Leaves from the Journal of a Life in the Highlands, from 1848–1861*, translated into Gaelic by the Rev. Mr. St. Clair. Concern was felt about the condition of the battlefield of Culloden which had become woefully neglected.

In 1921 a fresh wind blew into the Society with the appointment of Mr. Alex. N. Nicolson as its new secretary and treasurer. True, at times, this wind could be a perishing nor’ nor’ easter, causing chaos and bitterness — but it blew, and eventually fanned a steady flame of continuous activity. The efforts of the Right Hon. Iain Macpherson to have the Gaelic Clause inserted in the Education Act of 1918 were successful; the substance of the clause had been advocated by the Society from the time of its foundation and the actual movement for its insertion was initiated by the honorary secretary, Professor Watson. This clause made provision for the teaching of Gaelic in all schools, and John MacDonald, MA, a native of Kirkehill, was appointed Reader in Celtic in Aberdeen University, succeeding John Fraser (Glenurquhart) who went to the Celtic Chair at Oxford. The Rev. Archibald Scott, BD, became a member. Scott favoured the Ninian school of thought as regards the christianising of our island, whereas Dr. Watson favoured that of St. Columba — and excellent papers and stimulating debates were the result of wide research on this question. The Society, however, lost two valued members by the deaths of the Rev. Dr. Sinton and the Rev. A. MacLean Sinclair, DD. A welcome newcomer was the Duke of York who, on being approached by Lochiel, honoured the Society by becoming its patron.

Mr. Nicolson’s first squall blew over Lord Leverhulme’s adoption of the title Viscount of the Western Isles. At a meeting of the Society, on 23rd January, 1923, a resolution of protest against this assumption was unanimously passed. Copies of this resolution were sent to Lord Leverhulme, the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for Scotland, and the Lyon King of Arms. Replies received admitted that an error had been made by the College of Arms, London, but regretted it was now too late to have it rectified. A lengthy correspondence between the Society and Leverhulme ensued in which Leverhulme was asked to forego this title which trenched upon another and very ancient one — the Lord of the Isles. The Press and public opinion supported the Society, but Leverhulme proved adamant and adhered to the title he had chosen.

At last too, the Council of the Society appointed a Committee to restore and repair the Culloden graves, the Memorial Cairn, the old houses at Leanach, and the King’s

stables. For eighteen long years these subjects had been in a state of utter disrepair, and it gave tremendous satisfaction to the members, and indeed to Highlanders the world over, to have the battlefield and its environs restored to perfect order.

This was accomplished at a very happy time — for the Society was about to celebrate its Jubilee. Dr. William MacKay, still in good health and contributing regularly to the *Transactions*, was asked to be chief — an honour which he had already held — and which was now coupled with that of Honorary Secretary and Honorary Chieftain. In his speech he was proud to report that now the study of Gaelic in Scotland was making good progress. Under the Education Authorities, Gaelic was being taught over all the Gaelic speaking area, with the exceptions of Sutherland, Bute and Arran — and there was reason to believe that Sutherland was preparing to bring herself into line with the rest of the Highland counties. For more advanced scholarship Honours courses extending over four sessions were now being provided by Edinburgh, Glasgow and Aberdeen Universities. The publication, too, of the poems of MacMhaighstir Alasdair, and their translations by the veteran collaborators Rev. Dr. Archibald MacDonald, Kiltarlity, and Rev. Angus J. MacDonald, Killearnan was a work which all lovers of the Gaelic language would cherish. The Bard to the Society, the Rev. Dugald MacEchem, B.D., was to be congratulated on his work, *The Sword of the North* — a volume giving an excellent account of the part played by the Gael of Scotland in the Great War. In memory of those members who had served during this war it gave the Society great pleasure to donate £26 to the Lord Robert's Memorial Workshop opened in Inverness. The death of Kenneth Macdonald, Town Clerk lost a valuable member to the Society. His research into the history of the town and its churches was a delight to all who studied it, and the debt owed by the Gaelic church and its ministers for keeping the language alive should never be forgotten.

On 18th April, 1925, a ceremony was held for the first time at the Culloden Cairn, to commemorate the battle and all who had fallen there. Wreaths were placed on Ahe Cairn — one by the Earl of Cassilis on behalf of the subscribers to the Culloden Memorial Fund, bearing the inscription “An cuimhne air na Gaisgich,” and another by a lady, Mrs. Black Stewart of Philadelphia, who had contributed generously to the restoration fund. A short service was held, an address given by the Earl of Cassilis, and two laments, “The Flowers of the Forest” by Piper Finlayson of the Cameron Highlanders and “The MacKintosh Lament” by Mr. Morrison, Bogroy, played for the dead. From this date this ceremony became an annual event.

Over the years the upkeep of the battlefield was taken over by the National Trust for Scotland — and to-day, under the care of Mr. Neil Macdonald, it is one of our most popular tourist attractions, being visited annually by over a hundred thousand people.

At this time the Society felt that it ought to show its appreciation of the work done on its behalf by Mrs. Nicolson, wife of the secretary, who had toiled unceasingly for quite five years, helping her husband in his various and vastly differing projects. A replica, in silver, of an old Celtic chalice found in Iona made by Mr. Ritchie, who had done so much to encourage the study and diffuse the knowledge of Celtic Art in Scotland where for so long it had been shamefully neglected, was acquired for this purpose. This bore the inscription “Chaidh an còrn so a bhuileachadh air Sine NieNeacail, bean an Riinair, le Comunn Gaidhlig Ionbhair-nis mar theist air a saothair as leth a' Chomuinn,” and was received by Mrs. Nicolson with deep gratitude.

In 1926 a surprising proposal was made by the Iona Society, America, which offered to try to raise the sum of £40,000 to help establish a Celtic College, to be situated preferably in Inverness. There was a great deal of debate about the site of this college. Should it be in Inverness or elsewhere? At every level Dr. Watson advised caution, emphasising the difficulty which would be encountered owing to the lack of suitable teachers for the various subjects which would have to be included in the curriculum.

After 1928, however, America, like most other nations, was overtaken by the trade depression, a calamity which forced the Iona Society to drop all idea of the project. This caused no deep disappointment, actually as many had felt somewhat doubtful that the scheme would ever materialise — but it should never be forgotten that the proposal was made in good faith on the part of the Americans, who felt that they owed a debt of gratitude to, the Highlands, the Highland character, and the Gaelic language which had bred a race whose emigrants were a pride and asset to the New Country.

The death, in 1927, of the Rev. Charles M. Robertson, a most accurate Gaelic scholar and pioneer on dialects, deprived the Society of a very valuable member.

The following years brought further successes to the Society. A grant of £10 a year was secured for each school where Gaelic was taught. Distinguished scholars such as Dr. D. J. MacLeod, who had conferred on him by the French Government the Palmes Acadimiques with the distinction of Officier d'Academie, for his translation of the works of Duncan Ban Macintyre., Dr. Galbraith, Mr. Hugh Fraser, Glenurquhart, an eminent collector of Gaelic history; Mr. Roderick Barron, Mr. Donald Graham, Dr. Evan MacLeod Barron, Rev. Malcolm Maclean, Dr. D. J. MacDonoald, and Dr. Wm. Douglas Simpson, Aberdeen — most of these earned public approbation.

At the 1928 Culloden ceremony Mrs. Black-Stewart herself laid her wreath on the Cairn. She was also present at the dinner that year and replied to some of the toasts — the first lady member of the Society ever to do so.

It was, however, in this year that the Society lost two of its most eminent honorary chieftains — my own father, Mr. Alex. Macdonald, in February, and Dr. MacKay in April.

Of Dr. MacKay, Dr. Sinton wrote: “He supplied a wonderful instance of a man engrossed in the exacting duties of his professional life who had never ceased to hear the music of Loch Ness, and had never forgotten the scenes and associations of his early life. Dr. MacKay had given fitting expression to these early associations in his History of Urquhart and Glenmoriston which was not only a history of this district but a well of refreshment for the Highland heart,” and again in 1934, paid the following tribute to my father: “The work of Alex. MacDonald, his collection of Gaelic music and song, his original poems; his *Story and Song of Loch-Ness-side*, is known to you all. His infectious enthusiasm; his indefatigable work for the Society; his eager and persistent aim to shield from oblivion the songs; the tunes; the marches; the music; the customs and habits of his race, particularly those of his own Glen, will make the name of “Gleannach” adorn the annals of local patriotism.”

Just before his death my father was engaged in publishing a reprint of *The Complete Theory of the Scots Highland Bagpipe* by Joseph MacDonald — compiled about 1760 and first published in 1803. I, fortunately, with the help of his great friend Mr. Somerled MacDonald, and Mr. Archibald Campbell, Kilberry, was able to see this work finished — a work which had extraordinary repercussions of which I have written in the 1948 *Transactions*.

A further loss to the Society at this date was that of Mrs. Black Stewart. In her will she bequeathed \$2500 for the purpose of helping in the maintenance of the Culloden memorials, and the placing of a wreath in her name on the Cairn at the annual ceremony. She was buried in Tomnahurich Cemetery.

At Edinburgh University, on the retirement of Professor W. J. Watson in 1938, the chair was occupied by his son, Professor James Carmichael Watson, who had graduated there with first class honours in Classics and Celtic, and had edited Mary Macleod's Gaelic Poetry, a work which won him the Dr. Wm. MacKay memorial prize.

He was succeeded in 1938 as Lecturer in Celtic in the University of Glasgow by Mr. Angus Matheson, MA, who later became the first Professor of Celtic there, and brother of Rev. William Matheson MA, editor of *John MacCodrum's Poetry* and a lecturer at Edinburgh University at a later date. These added further lustre to the now brilliant intellectual crown of the Society.

The Diamond Jubilee Dinner of the Society was held in the Station Hotel on 27th March, 1931, the Chief being an Invernessian, Sir Murdoch MacDonald K.C.M.G. CB MP C.E.. In a short speech Colonel J. Kyle Mackintosh DSO referred to “Sir Murdoch” (as he was affectionately called) as an engineer who had won international fame and brought credit to himself and his town. As MP for Inverness, Sir Murdoch had shown an intense love for his native town and for all interests connected with the Highlands, and had done much to further the careers of many of its young people when they fared forth to take their places in the world.

In reply Sir Murdoch thanked Colonel Mackintosh, saying: “I thank Colonel Mackintosh and the Gaelic Society for the kindly reception given me tonight. I appreciate

it almost more than anything which has been conferred upon me, for nothing can be more pleasing to any living soul than to come back to his native town and feel he is at home and well received.”

Present at this function were Mr. Evan M. Barron (afterwards Dr. Barron), Chief in 1935. Provost MacEwen (afterwards Sir Alex. MacEwen, Chief in 1930); the Rev. Ewen MacRury; Baron Wm. MacKay, The Hague; Captain Wm. MacKay; Captain I. R. J. M. Grant of Glenmoriston; Dr. D. J. MacLeod; the Rev. Angus Boyd; Dr. Galbraith and Mr. Alex. Fraser, who had attended the inaugural meeting sixty years previously. Dr. Barron complimented the Society on having published thirty-two volumes of its *Transactions* since its foundation.

In 1932 the Chief of the Society was one of its life members — the Rt. Hon. the Countess of Cromartie — the first lady ever to hold this position. Lady Cromartie and her family had long shown keen interest in things Highland, and her very beautifully written articles about Highland people and ancient Highland life were popular everywhere.

In 1938 when Sir Stewart MacPherson, brother of Sir Iain, was Chief, the Society was bequeathed £100 from Mrs. Helena McNaughton-Ormiston towards the upkeep of Culloden Battlefield.

In spite of all these successes, however, the Society was faced with yet another very real difficulty. It lacked the money necessary for the publication of the many excellent papers contributed by its members. There was one who, during the past fifteen years, had given very real support and who now proved his sincerity by donating, in the name of himself and his wife, £100 for the publications fund. This was Dr. J. J. Galbraith — outstanding for his knowledge of the history of the Celt and the Celtic Church, of Celtic art, music and literature. Dr. Galbraith remained in office as Chief from 1939–1942, a period when war again disrupted the business of the Society, with many members fighting in the armed forces. Amongst those who lost their lives was the brilliant young Celtic professor, James Carmichael Watson.

An interesting personality in the Society at this time was Mr. Malcolm MacInnes MA LLB — “Calum Mòr” — who acted for several years as its piper. In his youth as a shinty player few could match him — and he somehow managed to get all he ever put into this game into his many other activities. His piping was strong and stirring; his laugh infectious; his worship of Highland song, music and verse almost ecstatic, whilst his ability to write, plays and operas, both in English and Gaelic, was amazing. An enormous Highlander in every sense of the word — full of learning; full of fun — but gentle and reverent in his approach to what he considered to be true art.

Chief of the Society in 1943 was the Rev. Archibald MacDonald DD who, in collaboration with the Rev. Angus J. MacDonald of Killearnan, was joint historian of *The Clan Donald* — a work extending to three volumes — and the *MacDonald Collection* — a volume of unpublished Gaelic Songs.

Another who brought lasting honour to Scotland was Major-General D. N. Wimberley CB DSO MC — son of that grand old earlier member and contributor of papers, Captain Wimberley, and Chief of the Society in 1947 — a year when Mr. and Mrs. Nicolson were again the recipients of handsome gifts from the members of the Society in gratitude for the work they had accomplished under all the stresses and strains of war.

In 1952 Sir Denys Lawson, Lord Mayor of London, became Chief of the Society. This was a popular choice — his wife, Lady Lawson, being a daughter of the late Iain Macpherson (Lord Strathearn of Banchor). A man keen to forward Highland interests, Sir Denys immediately offered to defray all expenses incurred in publishing a complete volume of the *Transactions* for the years 1951–1952. This generous gift, together with a further gift from Dr. Galbraith in 1945, helped to bring publication of the *Transactions* more or less up to date.

One who gained world wide appreciation for the Highland way of life and its irresistible, humour was Sir Compton MacKenzie, Chief in 1954. Was there ever any play more universally enjoyed than *Whisky Galore!*?

In 1960, after months of failing health, Mr. Nicolson died, having, in his latter years, been awarded the MBE for his work with regard to Culloden Battlefield. At a Memorial Service in the Old High Church, Inverness, tribute was paid to him by Dr. D. J. Macdonald J.P. MA in the following words:

*I think it would be correct to summarise Mr. Nicolson's work, not only for the Gaelic Society, but for the Gaelic cause in general, under three heads: The Dinner, Culloden, and the Syllabus.*

*With Mr. Nicolson the dinner became one of the high-lights of Inverness public ceremonies. An almost unerring choice of chiefs, men of affairs, great sailors and soldiers, as befitted a Highland gathering, and a small but very choice band of scholars gave uncommon standing and sense of occasion to the one time in the year when many more than the faithful few flocked to the standard ... In the years of neglect Mr. Nicolson was the presiding spirit of Culloden ... The syllabus, in its world-wide distribution — more lasting even than the care of the battlefield, is Mr. Nicolson's greatest memorial. The claymore and the target are hung on the wall, and we are the poorer.*

Something which none of the earlier members of the Society had ever envisaged was now to bring a new dimension into the world of Gaelic — the wireless. Which of the founders could ever have imagined that by the turning of a knob on a small box-like instrument any home in Britain could enjoy the exquisite music of the Gael? What would my grandmother and father have said could they have heard the first programme of the songs collected by them on Loch Ness-side broadcast, through the good offices of Mr. Fred Macaulay, successor to Mr. Hugh MacPhee in the BBC — Chief in 1965 — and Mr. William Matheson, sung by two leading singers, Miss Evelyn, Campbell and Mr. Alasdair Gillies, in 1960. Now at last was offered a platform where Gaelic literature, language and music could be staged to satisfy awaiting audiences the length and breadth of Britain.

On the death of Mr. Nicolson, two younger members, Mr. Hugh Barron and Mr. Farquhar Macintosh became Joint Honorary Secretaries until 1962 when Mr. Macintosh became Headmaster of Portree High School. Endowed with a true love of the Gaelic language, Highland history, tradition and genealogy, Mr. Hugh Barron, son of that former distinguished honorary chieftain, Mr. Roderick Barron, and grandson of a former member, Mr. John Cook, is unanimously considered an enthusiastic secretary by the Society. During his ten years in office he has contributed several papers to the *Transactions* and to *Scottish Gaelic Studies*. Helped by grants from the McCaig Trust, a donation of £150 from Mr. Edward MacCurdy, a bequest of £100 by Mr. John Maclean, Gourrock, and by the fact that since 1965 members have been contributing towards the cost of their copies, he has been responsible for the publication of six volumes of *Transactions*, as well as arranging the dinners, the Culloden Anniversary Ceremonies, and the programmes for the yearly lectures.

To-day one has only to mention members such as Mr. Rory MacKay, son of Captain William MacKay and grandson of Dr. William MacKay, one of the leading Gaels of the present time; the Macleans of Raasay, three brothers famous for their scholarship, one of whom, Mr. Samuel Maclean, is the Society's bard and foremost Gaelic literary critic, considered by many to be Scotland's finest contemporary poet, and Chief of the Society in 1970; Professor Derick Thomson; Professor K. H. Jackson; Dr. J. L. Campbell of Canna; the Very Rev. Dr. T. M. Murchison; Mr. Ronald MacLeod, awarded the OBE for his services to Gaelic education; Mr. Murdo Macleod, a former

Chieftain; Mr. D. J. MacCuish; Dr. Jean Dunlop and Mr. Alick Morrison, Clan historians; Rev. Dr. John Macpherson; Mr. John M. Mathieson; the Rev. William Matheson, an outstanding Highland genealogist, and unite them under the inspiring leadership of one who has been active in its interests for over forty years as Chief, Honorary Secretary and Honorary Chieftain, Dr. D. J. MacDonald, and does one need to be surprised to learn that the Society flourishes in 1971 just as successfully as it has ever done, keeping true to its early tenets of saying and publishing everything worth while in Gaelic literature, song and music, of looking after historical monuments of honouring Gaelic scholars and furthering the teaching of the language, of bringing to life everything connected with the old 1919 Highland way of living which to-day is recognised the world over as having been outstandingly beautiful and worth while — a guiding star to peace, happiness and harmony in a sorely distracted world.

And what of to-morrow, and the second millenium when machines will so reduce man's work that he will enjoy a life of comparative leisure — and study of the arts, languages, travel and general cultural activities take up a large part of his existence? Will not Highland culture then prove to be a rewarding study, and will not future generations feel deeply indebted and grateful to the Inverness Gaelic Society for the storehouse filled and bequeathed them by its members during these hundred years?

*Nis o 'n chaidh ceud bliadhna tharam  
Chan 'eil ino chridhe crionachadh;  
No glasadh air mo chiabhagan,  
's e m' iarruidh inairsinn beo.*

#### CHIEFS OF THE GAELIC SOCIETY OF INVERNESS

- 1872 – Cluny Macpherson of Cluny
- 1873 – Cluny Macpherson of Cluny
- 1874 – Sir Kenneth S. Mackenzie, Bart. of Gairloch
- 1875 – Charles Fraser Mackintosh, MP of Drummond
- 1876 – Professor John Stuart Blackie
- 1877 – Professor John Stuart Blackie
- 1878 – John Mackay C.E.
- 1879 – Lachlan MacDonald of Skeabost.
- 1880 – Rev. Thomas MacLauchlan LLD
- 1881 – Sir Patrick Grant G.C.B.
- 1882 – Charles Fraser Mackintosh MP
- 1883 – The Right Hon. The Earl of Dunmore
- 1884 – Donald Cameron of Lochiel MP
- 1885 – Allan R. Mackenzie, Yr. of Kintail
- 1886 – R. C. Munro-Ferguson of Novar
- 1887 – Mackintosh of Mackintosh
- 1888 – Mackintosh of Mackintosh
- 1889 – Sir Henry C. MacAndrew
- 1890 – Ian Murray Grant of Glenmoriston
- 1891 – S. Douglas Fletcher of Rosehaugh
- 1892 – Sir Kenneth Mackenzie, Bart.
- 1893 – Charles Fraser Mackintosh MP
- 1894 – Charles Fraser Mackintosh MP
- 1895 – Field-Marshal Sir Patrick Grant
- 1896 – J. E. B. Baillie MP of Dochfour
- 1897 – Cluny Macpherson of Cluny
- 1898 – The Rt. Hon. Lord Lovat
- 1899 – J. E. B. Baillie of Dochfour
- 1900 – Sir Hector Munro, Bart. of Fowlis
- 1901 – A. Bignold, MP of Lochrosque
- 1902 – Arthur Bignold, MP of Lochrosque.
- 1903 – The Rt. Hon. Lord Lovat CB DSO
- 1904 – J. P. Grant of Rothiemurchus
- 1905 – John A. Dewar MP
- 1906 – Sir Robert Finlay KC
- 1907 – The Rt. Hon. The Marquess of Tuilbardine MVO DSO
- 1908 – William Mackay LLD
- 1909 – Donald W. Cameron of Lochiel
- 1910 – Captain Ellice of Invergarry
- 1911 – The Rt. Hon. The Marquess of Stafford
- 1912 – Mackinnon of Mackinnon
- 1913 – The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Seafield

1914 – The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Seafield  
 1915 – The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Seafield  
 1916 – *Office vacant*  
 1917 – *Office vacant*  
 1918 – *Office vacant*  
 1919 – Colonel Donald W. Cameron C.M.G. A.D.C. of Lochiel.  
 1920 – General Sir Waiter Ross K.B.E. CB C.M.G.  
 1921 – William Mackay LLD  
 1922 – Colonel D. W. Cameron C.M.G. A.D.C. of Lochiel  
 1923 – Sir John Lorne MacLeod GBE LLD  
 1924 – Sir John Lorne MacLeod GBE LLD  
 1926 – Lt.-Col. John MacRae-Gilstrap of Eilean Donnan.  
 1927 – Professor W. J. Watson MA LLD D.Litt.Ceit.  
 1928 – His Grace The Duke of Atholl K.T. CB GCVO DSO LLD  
 1929 – The Right Hon. Iain Macpherson KC MP  
 1930 – Sir Reginald MacLeod of MacLeod, K.C.B.  
 1931 – Sir Murdoch MacDonald K.C.M.G. CB MP C.E.  
 1932 – The Right Hon. The Countess of Cromartie  
 1933 – Sir Alexander MacEwen R.L.  
 1934 – The Right Hon. Sir Iain Macpherson Bart., LLD KC MP  
 1935 – Evan MacLeod Barron LLD  
 1936 – Professor W. J. Watson MA LLD D.Litt.Ceit.  
 1937 – Sir Francis J. Grant K.C.V.O. LLD W.S., Lord Lyon King of Arms.  
 1938 – Sir T. Stewart Macpherson C.I.E. MA  
 1939 – Dr. J. J. Galbraith D.P.H. J.P.  
 1940 – Dr. J. J. Galbraith D.P.H. J.P.  
 1941 – Dr. J. J. Galbraith D.P.H. J.P.  
 1942 – Dr. J. J. Galbraith D.P.H. J.P.  
 1943 – Rev. Archibald MacDonald DD  
 1944 – Rev. Archibald Scott DD  
 1945 – Rev. Dugald MacEchern B.D.  
 1946 – Vice-Admiral R. R. MacGrigor K.C.B. DSO R.N.  
 1947 – Major-General Douglas N. Wimberley CB DSO MC D.L. LLD  
 1948 – The Right Hon. Lord Cameron DSO KC  
 1949 – General Sir A. F. P. Christison Bart. GBE CB DSO MC BA  
 1950 – Dr. D. J. MacLeod OBE MA HMCIS  
 1951 – Vice-Admiral Mackintosh of Mackintosh CB DSO D.S.C.  
 1952 – Sir Denys Lawson Bart., MA L.C.C. F.C.I.S.  
 1953 – The Right Hon. Lord MacDonald MBE, of Sleat.  
 1954 – Sir Compton MacKenzie OBE LLD  
 1955 – The Right Hon. Viscount Kilmuir of Creich GCVO P.C. Lord Chancellor.  
 1956 – Sir David Robertson, MP  
 1957 – The Right Hon. James Stuart, PC, MVO, MC, MP, LLD  
 1958 – Sir John MacLeod, MP  
 1959 – Colonel Neil MacLean, DSO, MP  
 1960 – Professor Angus Matheson, MA  
 1961 – Rev. Dr. T. M. Murchison, MA  
 1962 – Mr. John M. Rollo, OBE, BSc  
 1963 – Sir Hugh Watson, DKS, LLD  
 1964 – Dr. Donald J. Macdonald, JP, MA, FEIS  
 1965 – Dr. John L. Campbell of Canna, MA  
 1966 – Mr. Hugh MacPhee, MBE, FSA (Scot.).  
 1967 – Mr. Alasdair R. MacKenzie, MP  
 1968 – Rev. William Matheson, MA  
 1969 – Professor Derick S. Thomson, MA, BA  
 1970 – Mr. Sam Maclean, MA  
 1971 – Captain William Mackay.

#### HONORARY CHIEFTAINS

In the Constitution of the Society it is laid down that the Society has power to elect distinguished men as Honorary Chieftains to the number of seven. Those who have received this honour are here named along with the year in which they were elected:—

1872 – Sir Kenneth S. MacKenzie, Bart. of Gairloch.  
1873 – Professor John Stuart Blackie  
1873 – Duncan Davidson of Tulloch  
1873 – Charles Fraser Mackintosh, LLD, MP of Drummond.  
1880 – Rev. Alexander MacGregor, MA  
1880 – Cluny Macpherson of Cluny  
1882 – Colin Chisholm  
1882 – Rev. Thomas MacLauchlan, LLD  
1882 – Sheriff Alexander Nicolson, MA, LLD  
1894 – Alexander MacBain, LLD, MA  
1894 – William MacKay, LLD  
1894 – Alexander MacKenzie, Editor, *Scottish Highlander*  
1896 – Duncan Campbell, Editor, *Northern Chronicle*.  
1896 – John MacKay, CE, Hereford  
1901 – Alexander A. Carmichael, LLD  
1901 – Alexander Macpherson, Kingussie  
1904 – William MacKenzie, Secretary, Crofters' Commission  
1904 – Professor William J. Watson, MA, LLD D.Litt.Celt.  
1923 – Sir D. W. Cameron, KT, CMG, ADC, of Lochiel  
1925 – Alexander MacDonald (Gleannach)  
1925 – Malcolm MacFarlane, Elderslie  
1926 – Sheriff George Campbell, VD, DL  
1926 – John L. Robertson, CB, LLD, HMCIS  
1928 – Rev. Archibald Scott, DD  
1932 – Donald J. Macleod, OBE, MA, D.Litt., HMCIS  
1938 – Dr. J. J. Galbraith, DPH  
1939 – Hugh A. Fraser, MBE, MA  
1943 – Rev. Archibald MacDonald, DD  
1948 – Edward MacCurdy, MA  
1952 – Roderick Barron, MC, MA, HMIS  
1952 – Rev. Donald Lamont, DD  
1952 – Eachann MacDhughail  
1952 – John N. MacLeod  
1952 – Alexander N. Nicolson, MBE, Secretary to the Society  
1955 – Sam. Maclean MA  
1955 – Professor Angus Matheson, MA  
1955 – Rev. Thomas M. Murchison, DD  
1956 – General Sir A. F. P. Christison, Bart., GBE, CB, DSO, MC, BA  
1960 – Rev. William Matheson, MA  
1965 – Donald J. Macdonald, JP, MA, LLD F.E.I.S.  
1965 – Captain William MacKay OBE  
1965 – Angus MacLellan MBE  
1969 – Ronald MacLeod OBE MA HMIS

## **BARDS**

Angus MacDonald — 1871–1874  
Mrs. Mary MacKellar — 1876–1890  
Neil Macleod, Edinburgh — 1891–1902  
Alex. MacDonald — 1903  
Rev. Dugald MacEchern — 1904–1945  
Samuel Maclean, MA — 1946–