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# The Coll Magazine

"Col for my money!" — Dr Johnson, The journal of a Tour to the Hebrides.

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# AN COMUNN COLLACH

## THE COLL ASSOCIATION

Founded 1931

An Comunn Collach — the Coll Association was formed in 1931 to meet an expressed need and fulfil a set of objectives which are as pertinent and desirable today over fifty years later as they were to our founders. The Association exists to—

(a) cultivate a friendly spirit between the members and to hold meetings from time to time for social intercourse and mutual enjoyment

(b) afford relief, whenever possible to deserving and necessitous persons connected with the island for which purpose a Benevolent fund is maintained

(c) preserve everything pertaining to the traditions, history, poetry, lore and all that is best in the events of the island of Coll, the welfare and interest of the people in the island, and of natives elsewhere and all which pertains to the betterment of the Highlands of Scotland in general.

Laudable aims which are being successfully met by today's "Collachs" with the Association acting as a focal point for those who have connections and attachments of all descriptions with the island of Coll.

The Association is based in Glasgow where the majority of members are domiciled but its influence extends beyond and abroad. Members are found in Germany, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the Persian Gulf and the United States. Members come from all walks of life — commerce, industry, the professions — one member is even a Member of the European Parliament! All are proud of their association with the island of Coll and the special influence Coll exerts on all who come under the spell of "our" island. It is therefore natural that such kindred spirits can and do combine to form an Association which continues to promote all things Coll and of the "Collachs". If your interest in Coll is such that you want to know more of the Association's activities please write to me — Angus Kennedy, Secretary, "Torbairn", 26 Southern Road, Strathblane, Stirlingshire G63 9DB.

### An Comunn Collach

Honorary Presidents:

Rev. New Campbell, Mr Robert S. Junior  
Mrs Doreen MacDonald, Mrs Mary MacDonald  
Miss Betty MacInnes  
Mr N. Campbell MacKinnan  
Mr James MacInnes  
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Tel. Blanefield 70677

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ALAN GIBBERTS (Jr.)  
17 Ormonde Drive, Glasgow G44  
Tel. 041-637 3570

### Association Activities include:

Ceilidh Dances, Annual Dinner,  
Film Shows, Tatties & Herring  
Night, Beetle Drives, Bus Outings,  
Ceilidh Visits, Golf Matches,  
Summer Events in Coll.

Are you connected with the island of Coll by birth, parentage, marriage, or residence, or are you simply otherwise interested in the island? If you are — why not join The Coll Association and participate in all the Association's activities and objectives?

An Comunn Collach (The Coll Association) maintains a Benevolent Fund. The object and conditions of the fund are outlined as follows:

"To afford relief whenever possible to deserving and necessitous persons connected with the island of Coll by birth, parentage, marriage or residence, or who are otherwise interested in the island, such cases to be considered on their merits by the Benevolent Fund Committee, and for this purpose, a Benevolent Fund be maintained separate from the General Purposes Fund, and it shall be governed by the Executive Committee of the Association. Any emergency claims arising throughout the year to be disbursed by the Office Bearers."

Any enquiries or claims regarding the Benevolent Fund should be intimated in the first instance by letter or, in an emergency, by telephone to the Secretary.

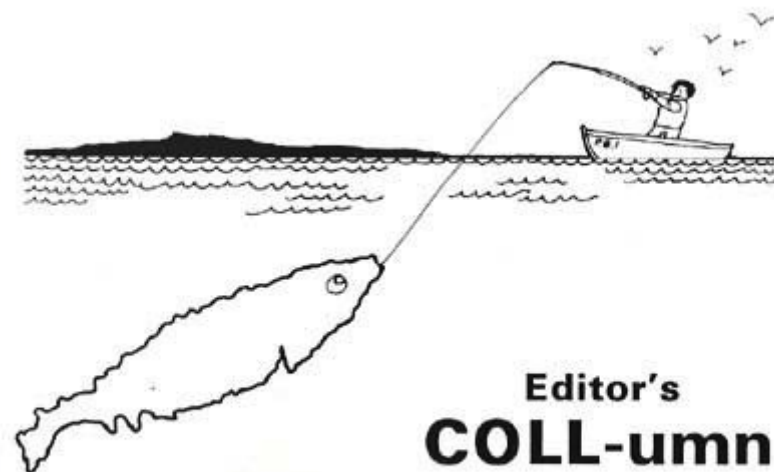
### To Join the Association

Fill in this form and send it together with your remittance to:

THE SECRETARY, ANGUS KENNEDY  
26 SOUTHERN ROAD, STRATHBLANE G63 9DB.

Please email

Life Membership — £100



## Editor's COLL-umn

On first sighting, Coll looks like a fish-shaped lump of rock, bog and sand that juts from the sea between Mull and Tiree. About a hundred and twenty people live there, the majority in or near the one village of Arinagour. The village has two churches, two shops, one school, one hotel, one guest-house, one post office, one petrol pump. The island's three roads lead from the village — south-westward to its two old castles at Breacacha and to Ballyhough Farm, and north-eastward to Sorisdale, formerly a flourishing settlement, but now with only one permanent resident. Singularity is an essential part of the islanders' life-style — there is plenty of room for it to flourish.

As for me, I am not a Collach by birth, not even a Scot, and I only spend about a third of each year there — the summery third, which is actually cheating. My first sight of Coll was on a rainy Spring day eighteen years ago, before the new pier was built, when the ferry-boat used to come out to meet the old *Claymore* in the bay. And the first Collach I saw was a rotund man with a reddish-purple face and a reddish-purple sweater who shouted 'Jump' to those passengers foolhardy enough to be Collward bound.

I jumped, and that was the beginning of what has turned out to be an addiction. Coll is an acquired taste; once acquired, the taste remains, I believe and hope, for life. And so it has happened that, though I've seen many of the wide world's famous "views", my favourite one is looking out over the bay at Hyne on a clear summer evening towards the Treshnish Isles and distant Staffa beyond.

It is, then, because I am so fond of Coll and because I am a writer by profession that I've long wanted to start a magazine such as this. I hope it will provide pleasure and perhaps a little more understanding for all who appreciate the island's worth, as I do, and, in the wider context, for all who believe, as I do, that the Hebridean way of life should not only be preserved and recorded but enriched and encouraged. I'm well aware that this first issue of Coll's first-ever magazine has its faults, partly perhaps because I've tried to please everybody. I can only say that any faults are due to oversight or ignorance, never to malice and that I welcome readers' comments and suggestions for future improvements!

**"Micheal agus Niall  
aig a' chladach"**

**"Micheal agus Niall  
a'dol dhan bhùth"**

Dà stòirich, le dealbhan  
tarraingeach, airson a leughadh do  
chlann òga.

Faclan le Lisa Storey  
Dealbhan le Màiri Hedderwick

...90sg. an t-aon...

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## **THE SCHOOLS OF COLL IN THE "GOOD OLD DAYS"**

by Betty MacDougall



*In general, the author has noted that the "powers-who-were" often complained of the poor attendance of the Coll children and, when called in question, parents pleaded a lack of clothing and footwear. Most people were very poor in those days and if children got a soaking on the way to school and back again it would be difficult to provide them with a dry outfit for the next day. Wellingtons were unknown for children... There was great difficulty in staffing Coll schools, sometimes weeks passed without a teacher, some teachers only stayed for brief periods and often local ministers or other worthies were called in to help...*

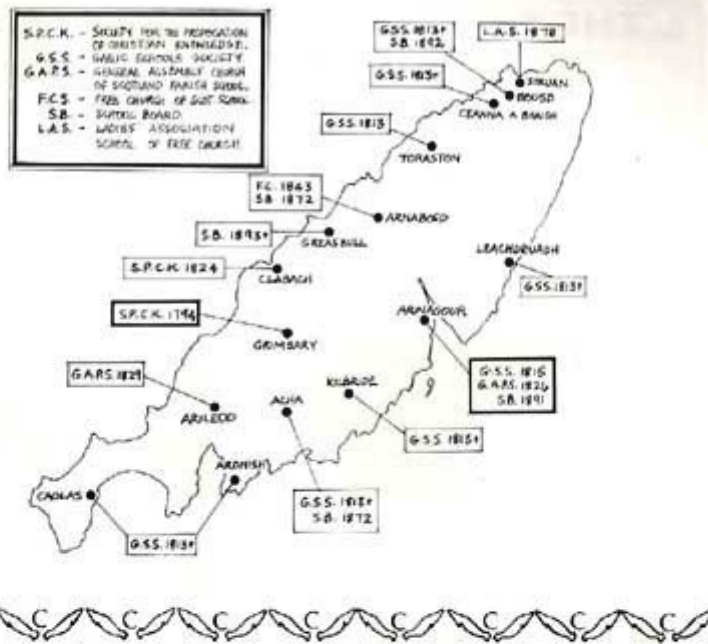


The first energetic movement for general education in the Highlands and Islands was launched by the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.), founded in 1707 which worked in co-operation with the Church of Scotland. S.P.C.K. records mention a school in Coll as early as 1725, which must have petered out quickly, but in 1794 a successful settlement was made somewhere in Grimsary, the exact site unknown. The schoolmaster was Ebenezer Davidson, a diligent and dedicated teacher by all accounts. Among his pupils was Lachlan MacLean of the Arnabosd family who later settled in Glasgow, wrote several books in English and Gaelic and was a leading light in Gaelic literary circles.

A society inspector who visited the school in 1824 described the schoolroom as being also the church of the island so the school must have been transferred to Clabach. There were 35 scholars attending, he reported, increasing to 50 in winter when their parents didn't require help on the crofts. Obviously that one school couldn't

cater adequately for the educational needs of the whole island which had, at that time, a population of about 1,300. And indeed, prior to the early nineteenth century, the common folk had scant opportunity for any sort of schooling. At this time upper class families (the laird and his kinsmen) used the old Celtic system of fosterage, or had private tutors for the young and sent their sons to mainland schools.

In 1811 the Gaelic Schools Society was founded for the express purpose of teaching the inhabitants of Gaeldom to read the scriptures in their native tongue. Its schools were ambulatory, meaning that a teacher would spend about two years in a school, then leave his best pupils to carry on with the work whilst he moved to another place; eventually he moved on again, or returned to his first post. The Society's first school was opened at Toraston in 1813 and the shell of the building still stands in that deserted township. When it was inspected in 1814 by the Minister, Mr Davidson, there were between 40 to 60 pupils. The schoolmaster



then was Alexander MacKenzie and he moved on to Arinagour where his roll varied from 30 to 70 children and adults, depending on the seasonal work.

Other sites of the Gaelic Schools in Coll were at Ardnish, Kilbride, Acha, Caolas, Leachdruadh, Ceanna a Bhaigh and Bousd. The schools were held in very humble shelters but the teachers gave devoted service. One was David Fowler from the Black Isle and tradition has it that he used to march his pupils down to Bousd Strand to teach them their letters on the firm sand. One of Fowler's daughters, incidentally, married a local crofter and their son Alexander was the first East End postman—who later died on the road with his pack on his back.

Schooling was still the province of the Church of Scotland and in 1824 the Education Committee of its General Assembly decided to set up schools where

required. As there had never been an official Parish School in Coll the first General Assembly School was opened at Arinagour in 1826 with Alexander Stewart from Perthshire in charge. In his first half-yearly report Stewart recorded a roll of 107, made up of 77 males and 30 females of all ages. But in 1829 it was reported that the school had removed to Arileod and local tradition avers that it was housed in the present byre of Arileod Farm.

The great division in the Church of Scotland, the Disruption of 1843, affected the schools as well as the churches. In Coll, the whole population followed their Minister into the Free Church and Alexander Stewart went with them. He had thus to vacate the Arileod byre and established his Free Church school at an unknown site at Arnaboss. One Robert MacDonald took over the Arileod school for several years but when he left the island there was no replacement for quite a while.

In 1863, John Lorne Stewart, the new proprietor of the main part of the island, had a new school built at Acha with a commodious house attached. This was at a time when unease regarding the state of education in the Hebrides reached parliamentary level and another tour of inspection was launched by the government. In the resulting report Coll was assessed as one of the worst off areas for the provision of education. Responding to this, John Lorne Stewart had another school built at Arnaboss, the present roofless building at the crossroads. So, when the Education Act of 1872 made education compulsory, this school and the one at Acha became the Board Schools.

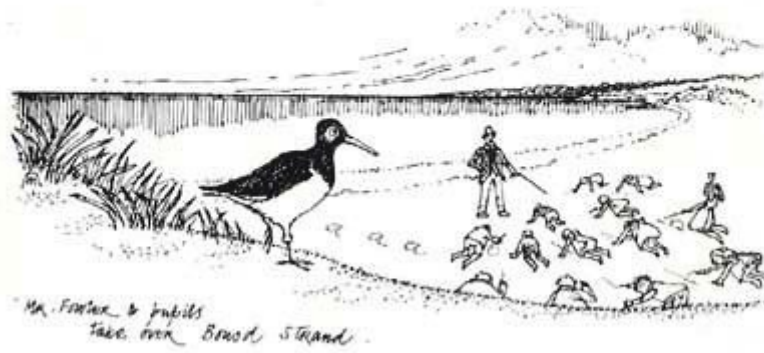
Prior to this, in 1850, another scholastic initiative had been taken — the Ladies' Association Schools, so-called because the women of the Free Church organised them. Despite pleas for a school in the island's East End it was not until 1878 that one was settled at Bousd, in Struan House where Miss Mary Lang now lives. Until that time, the intermittent visits by Gaelic School teachers were the only opportunities available to the East-enders. The Association's schools employed only divinity students who thereby got assistance with their college fees. Unfortunately they had to absent themselves in the winter for the

college term, but contracted to leave someone in charge.

The 1872 Education Act transferred the Acha and Arnaboss schools from the authority of the Assembly to the School Board and new Board schools were built at Arinagour in 1891 and at Bousd the next year. A small side-school was later opened for a few years at Greasbail to cater for children in the area and it was housed in the little corrugated iron building at the roadside near the farmhouse. This was because parents rebelled against sending their children through the bogs from the North Coast road to Acha school and it was indeed a very long walk from, say, Caolas to Acha in bad weather. The five-year-olds just couldn't make it and often didn't start school till they were nearly seven.

In recent years things have certainly changed. Due to an ever-diminishing population and the centralising policy of the Scottish Education Department, the outlying schools were closed in 1942 and the children transported to school by car. Acha school is now the residence of Mr and Mrs K. Stewart; the Arinagour School is now the factory for Coll Herbals Ltd; the Bousd building is now owned by Major Bristol as headquarters of the Project Trust. And in 1956 a modern school was opened in Carnan Road with council housing nearby.

My acknowledgements are due to the National Library in Edinburgh and the Argyll County Archivist in Lochgilphead for access to educational records. B.MacD.



Mr. Fowler & pupils  
take over Bousd Strand.