



Article by Betty MacDougall (1995)

Emigration...and Return / The Brilliant & The George Fyffe Emigration Series Part 3

EMIGRATION ... AND RETURN

Emigration, from the collection of Norman MacKenzie.

THE BRILLIANT & THE GEORGE FYFFE EMIGRATION SERIES PART 3

The Brilliant

The next phase of emigration from Coll on a large scale was in the late 1830s as a result of the near famine conditions following on the near crop failures of 1836-37.

The sailing of the *Brilliant* in 1837 for Australia was the subject of an article in the Coll Magazine of 1990 by Mrs Marjorie Foster, descendant of one of the MacLean families that had to leave Coll then. An account of the sailing in the *Inverness Courier* of October, 1837, "The people to be conveyed by this vessel are decidedly the most valuable that have ever left the shores of Britain. They are all of excellent moral character and from their knowledge of agriculture and management of sheep and cattle, must prove a most valuable acquisition to a colony like New South Wales." The total number of emigrants was 322, 73 of them from Coll. The passage took 116 days which was a good average for that time. The ship's surgeon, Angus J. Campbell reported that the ship was healthy, one boy had died, two had been born on the voyage and three children had died since landing. The chairman of the passengers' committee wrote a letter of appreciation on their behalf to Captain Gilkinson, thanking him for his consideration during the voyage.

The George Fyffe

The 1994 issue of the Coll Magazine had an article by Fiona MacDonald Brand on the sailing of the *George Fyffe* from Tobermory on 16th September, 1839.

The *George Fyffe* was a 460 ton barque and this was her maiden voyage. She was the 16th of Government chartered ships leaving Scottish ports since 1837 and arrived at Sydney, 20th January 1840, a passage of 131 days. There were only two Coll families on board, the MacDonald family of 3 generations: parents and children and a married son with wife and children. This was Fiona Brand's family as described in the 1994 article.

The only other family on board was the widow of the famous Coll Cooper, Mary MacLean with her sons and daughters. Her husband had just recently died and the family decided to emigrate. The Widow MacLean was listed as Midwife with her younger children Robert and Lexy. The older boys, Allan and John were described as Farm Servants with their sister Mary. Another daughter Isabella was married to a Malcolm MacNiven and they had an infant son Malcolm.

The exploits of the Coll Cooper, Alexander MacLean (1774-1838), have become legend. He was both skilled at his craft and an intrepid seaman, renowned for his seafaring and smuggling activities. Engaged in the latter he travelled all around the Hebrides and to the north coast of Ireland. So skilled was he at sailing his small skiff that the customs cutters were never able to catch him. He also went out alone to harpoon the basking sharks: once a shark pulled the boat away on the ebb tide to Tiree. Holding on firmly he came back to Coll on the flood tide and landed his catch. He was also a bard, some of his poems having been published in "The MacLean Bards". Sadly, whilst still in his prime, he died after catching a chill whilst cutting seaweed on the shore.*

An account of the successful career of the MacLean family in Australia and New Zealand can be read in 'From Little Towns in a Far Off Land We Came' by Helen MacLean Buckley.

The shipping list includes some very interesting comments made by the ship's surgeon, Dr. Liddell.

Divine Service was performed every Sunday, either by the doctor or by Hugh MacDonald of the Coll family who also gave prayers every morning in Gaelic at his own request. A school was early organised, attended by 30 pupils. The preservation of health was promoted by the daily practice of bringing beds on deck, strict attention to the cleaning of water closets and prohibiting all washing and shaving between decks. In the warmer latitudes, using the wind sails regularly and encouraging the habit of taking diet on deck. Dancing was encouraged, frequent washing of clothes and strict attention to the weekly muster on Sunday and to the state of the children at the daily morning muster.

The ship arrived in healthy condition, not a single death.

On arrival, some of the migrants disagreed with the work terms offered to them, amongst the men in dispute were Hugh MacDonald and Michael MacNiven. They were removed from Barracks for refusing to engage at the arranged rates but were later satisfactorily placed. Hugh MacDonald was later in a sound enough situation to allot financial help for his married sister who had remained in Coll with her husband and children. They arrived on the *Lloyds* in 1856.

* The full account of the exploits of the Coll Cooper, Alexander MacLean is related in 'Folklore from Coll', p.19, by Betty MacDougall.

Emigration Series, Part 2

In the 1994 magazine, the account of the ship Skelton had a closing paragraph about a MacDonald family that had been on board but nothing was known of their subsequent career. In the course of the summer an enquiry about this very family came to Coll. They had gone to Tasmania as free settlers and taken up land on the Derwent River. Later they moved to Victoria and took up land there. The enquirer is resident in New Zealand.

Betty MacDougall

Images associated with this article:-

