

Hebridean Homecoming Year



The Queen's Award  
for Voluntary Service

Highlands and Islands Community Newspaper of the Year 2022

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## The Metagama: 100 Years On



Award for Coinneach



CEBac's New Home



Bowls Champions

Plus: Back FC Season Preview • Horticulture Hints and Tips • Old Photos and lots more!

# Fàilte



The clocks have jumped forward and there are lambs on the crofts. Spring is finally here. Let's hope for better weather than last year, which was a total washout from start to finish. It's been a difficult start to the lambing season for some, but we hope that things improve for our crofters and the gardeners. I've already started fertilising my hedge fortnightly to encourage some growth—the neighbours will be thinking I'm bonkers 'watering' the plants in the rain! The deer aren't helping...they've been helping themselves to my tentative hedglings; I need them to grow fast so that they aren't decimated again when the deer return with a vengeance in the autumn. The hedge will also help with the road noise and hopefully shield us from some of the maniacs who fly past at 80mph+ while still in a 40 zone. So, spring, please bring us some nice sunshine, a sprinkling of light rain now and again, and some pleasant temperatures to aid our sanity, which has been battered of late, and support the new life and growth the season brings.

This month, you will notice, our issue is a special edition in that we have several pages devoted to the centenary of the *Metagama's* sailing from Stornoway to Canada in April 1923. As well as an in-depth look at the ship herself, we have a grandson's account of his grandfather's decision to sail, a report from the concert held at Back FRC, and the children from Tong School have submitted some quite excellent creative writing pieces, pulling together all they have learned about this period in the island's history through the Dileab project. I really must commend their efforts and I'm confident there is a future editor/contributor to this publication among these young writers. As the schools' *Metagama* event at Upper Coll was held after our deadline, we will have more photos for you in the next issue.

Much has been said elsewhere about the reasons so many left our island 100 years ago. It is another part of our history, like the highland clearances of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, where decisions made

elsewhere have had a direct impact on our economy and population. It is not entirely dissimilar to what is happening in the present day, with the proposals being made to designate much of the waters around our island as 'highly protected marine areas' (HPMAs), which may mean, according to local experts, a near-collapse of the fishing, shellfish and even tourism industries here. CnES has come out strongly against the plans, and there is still time to contribute to the government consultation. You can find it online at <https://consult.gov.scot/marine-scotland/scottish-highly-protected-marine-areas/consultation/> (closing date 17 April).

With an already declining population and working families and young people being priced out of the property market, what will this mean for our already fragile communities if it goes ahead? We lack resilience. This is clear when the ferry is off for a day. Within hours the supermarkets shelves are empty. We are entirely reliant on imports. It is time to start taking back some sort of control over what can be achieved and produced here, so please do engage with our new Development Officer (see p. 6) with ideas and support as he tries to make inroads into making our local area more sustainable for the future. What the Galson Estate and Urra Oighreachd Chàrlabhaigh are achieving just shows what can be done with a group effort. It takes a village, as they say. And no one knows this place better than those who live and work here.

Finally, if you wish to contribute any items, whether it be text or photographs, to our special 'homecoming' series this year, please do so. We hope to feature at least one related article in each 2023 issue. Contact any of the team, or email me directly at [latneditor2@outlook.com](mailto:latneditor2@outlook.com)

Until next time.

Jayne

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**Submit an article or a photograph** to the *Loch a Tuath News* by post (73 Newmarket, HS2 0DU) or by email ([latneditor2@outlook.com](mailto:latneditor2@outlook.com)). Contributions are preferred in digital format if possible. We are able to scan photos and documents. Please contact the editor to make an appointment. If you need to have an article typed, please contact the secretary.

**Missed any issues?** If you would like a copy of any *Loch a Tuath News* sent to you, then please get in touch with Colin Tucker, [colintucker2000@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:colintucker2000@yahoo.co.uk); tel.: 01851 820685.

**We need you** to keep us informed of any news you would like to share with the rest of the community. Please get in touch with your local correspondents, who give their free time each month to collate all the news items. They are the 'eyes and ears' of the district, but they need your help. See the contact details on this page. Thanks!

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The views expressed in the *Loch a Tuath News* by named individuals, unless otherwise stated, are not necessarily endorsed by the LATN Editorial committee.

## Gress



Lucy Beth Davis ▲

◀ Ruairidh and Gregor Macphail

## As Na Bailtean

### Cross Country

The winter cross country races are over for the season and many of our local pupils took part. Sgoil a' Bhac won the trophy for the highest percentage of pupils participating. The U11 boys' team and U11 girls' team won the trophies for the fastest teams throughout the races. A special mention must go to the Macphail brothers, (no. 36a Gress) who did extremely well. Ruairidh MacPhail got second overall in the U13 boys and Gregor Macphail got second overall in the U11 boys. *Nach math a rinn sibh!* (See our back page for all the photos.)

### New Baby

Lucy Beth Davis was born on 9 February 2023 at 19.40 weighing 7lb 12oz. After a 3-week stay in the neonatal care unit in Glasgow's Royal Hospital for Children she is now at home with her big sister Sadie and her mummy and daddy: Laura-Jayne and Nicolas. Lucy Beth is the ninth grandchild of Ian Maciver, 13 Urquhart Gardens, Stornoway, and the sixth grandchild of Kinny and Neil Davis of Gress Lodge, Gress.

### Wedding Bells

Congratulations to Diane Bruce and Kyle Beattie who were married on 11 March at the Kingsmills Hotel in Inverness. Kyle is from Elgin and Diane is the daughter of Amanda and Gavin Bruce and granddaughter of Murdina Ferguson and the late John Ferguson (Left), 15 Gress. We wish you all the best in your married life.



▲ Diane and Kyle with Diane's parents Amanda and Gavin

### Metagama

Emigration is very much at the forefront of our minds at the moment. Mairi 'Ghlen' MacIennan, no. 23, remembers her mother Catriona's association with the *Metagama*. Catriona, 'Bean Ghlen' was from South Dell, Ness and as a youngster of 12 years, remembered the *Metagama* sailing round the Butt of Lewis, heading for Canada. She recalled that there were many bonfires to be seen along the coast and the sadness that was felt in the district as young folk left. However, her family had cause for celebration as that was the day that her younger sister, Mairead, was born.

### Bereavement

It is with sadness that we report that Janet Macdonald, late of 9 Gress, passed away peacefully in Ospadal Nan Eilean, Stornoway, on 23 February, aged 87 years. Janet was born on 8 November 1935 and was the youngest of a family of five, two boys and three girls. After leaving school she worked in hotels in Edinburgh and around Inverness. She married *Jimsey*, a Gress boy, on 12 October 1960 and set up home in Janet's family home. They were blessed with four sons: Jamie, Alex John, Iain and Graham. All the boys married, and she had six grandchildren: Rachel, Eilidh, Graham, Catherine, Andrew and Alex. Sadly, *Jimsey* passed away in December 1995, but Janet was fortunate to have her family to support her.



▲ Janet Macdonald

In later years, she worked in Dun Eisdean and, after retiring, volunteered in the Bethesda shop, where she made many friends. Despite suffering ill health in the last 18 months of her life, Janet bore her illness with patience and fortitude. Her faith gave her comfort and strength and visits from Rev. Colin Macleod and church Elders were much appreciated.

The family would like to thank friends and neighbours for the kindness and generosity shown to them at this sad time. They are also very grateful for donations to the funeral collection, which was shared between MacMillan Nurses and Bethesda. We send our sincere sympathy to Jamie and Anne, Alex John and Ishbal, Iain and Kate, Graham and Michelle, all the grandchildren and wider family circle as she will be greatly missed.



Nana Murdag was there via FaceTime ▲

# VATISKER

## New Baby

Congratulations to Sarah and James Macleod (Lochside, Tolsta) on the arrival of Elliyah Kate on 17 January, weighing 6lb 8 oz. Elliyah is a younger sister for Juliette and a new grand-daughter for Robert and Murdina France (9 Vatisker) and Murdo and Erica Macleod (Holm).

## Bereavements

We sent our condolences to the family of Kennethina (Ina) Forbes, who passed away on 27 February at Bankhouse Care Home, Lesmahagow, aged 90 years. She was the beloved wife of the late Alexander Forbes, a much-loved mum to Anne, Catriona and Robert, a loving gran to Naomi, Kirsty, Liam, Eilidh, Lorna and Matthew, and great-gran to William, Finley, Erin and Amelia. Ina was a sister to Neil John and the late Rev. Kenneth Stewart, 26 Vatisker.

## Elliyah Macleod ▶

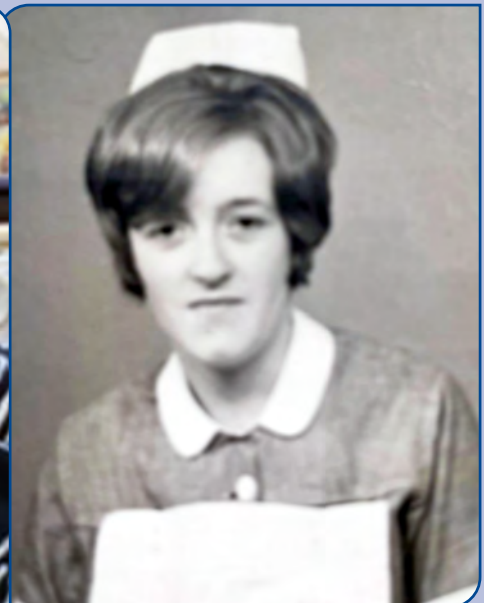
We were also saddened to hear of the passing of Cathy Mary (Macleod) Owens, aged 72, at home with her family in Inverness. Cathy Mary grew up at 22 Broadbay View. At the age of 16 she left school and trained as a nurse, a year later she moved to Inverness to complete her training and started working in the new Raigmore Hospital. She remained there until her retirement 41 years later. She was a regular visitor to Back, latterly caring for her parents, Donald (*Samson*) and Violet Macleod. She will be sorely missed by her husband Trevor, son Donald, his wife Fiona and their family, along with grandchildren and great-grandchildren. She will also be missed by her siblings, Angela, Dolina and Alex Neil and their families. Trevor and Donald would like to extend their thanks for the many heart felt messages received from many in the village who knew Cathy Mary.



▶ Cathy Mary Owens ▼



▲ Ina Forbes



# BACK

## Diamond Anniversary

Jimmy and Isobel Mackenzie (*Ishbal Canadian*; now of Jamieson Drive, Stornoway) celebrated their diamond wedding anniversary on 20 March. Isobel also celebrated her 85th birthday on 20 March and Jimmy was 85 on 21 March. Many congratulations!



Jimmy and Isobel Mackenzie



## UPPER COLL

### Graduation

We send heartiest congratulations to Eilidh Stewart-Harding who has graduated from the University of the Highlands and Islands with a BA, first class honours, in Food, Nutrition and Textiles in Education. Eilidh graduated in October and is currently completing her probationary year at a school in Glasgow. Eilidh is the daughter of Margaret Stewart, Lamraig, 19 Upper Coll. We wish you well for all your future endeavours.



Eilidh Stewart-Harding, ▲



Coinneach Maciver ▲

### Sàr Ghàidheal Fellowship

Kenny Maciver, 11 Upper Coll, has been honoured with this special award for his outstanding contribution to the Gaelic Language and its culture at a special event at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig in March. Each year the fellowship is awarded to two people and this was the first time in three years that the event has taken place. Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is celebrating its 50th anniversary year and Kenny recently celebrated 50 years in broadcasting so we send our very good wishes to both. Congratulations Kenny from everyone in Upper Coll and beyond!

### Get well wishes

We remember everyone who is unwell currently, whether in hospital or at home. We also remember the families who are looking after loved ones and the challenges they also face. We send our warmest thoughts to you all.

### Snow Fun

The children in our village certainly enjoyed the recent snowy spell, as you can see from the photos!

### Village news

Please do get in touch if you have any news you would like to share in our village column.

## Snow Fun



▲ Brody and Logan Maclean



▲ Murray and Lydia Maciver



▲ Joel and Evelyn Campbell



▼ Lydia and Caleb Maciver

## COLL

### Bereavements

We were saddened to hear of the passing of Chrissie Gordon (*Mhochan*), 7 Coll, beloved wife of Duncan and dear mother of Colin, Alasdair and Catriona, and a dear grandmother. Chrissie was well known throughout the district and will be remembered as a very kind neighbour.

We also send our condolences to Donald Smith, Ness, on the passing of his wife Donald, daughter of the late Alex Murdo and Dollag, Out End Coll. We also remember her sons Ben and Sandy at this sad time.

# TONG

## Graduations

Congratulations to Aaron Finlay Macleod (*mac Neil Angus (Spread) and Chrisanne (Soda)*), Aird Tong, who has graduated as an Aircraft Technician with Boeing. Aaron and his family enjoyed his graduation, lunching under the wings of Concorde. The graduation ceremony was held at the Bristol Aerospace Museum. Aaron is a former pupil of Tong Primary and the Nicolson Institute, and is now based at London Gatwick, where he continues to progress in his chosen career.

Calum Macrae recently graduated from Strathclyde University with a Bachelor of Science in Software Development with First Class Honours during his apprenticeship at JP Morgan, where he will continue his career. Calum is the son of DA and Joanna Macrae, Craignish, Tong.



Shana Macphail ▲



Aaron Finlay Macleod ▲

## Cross Country

Congratulations to Ryan Weatherston, P3 Tong Primary, who came third overall in the under-9 boys' category in the Lewis and Harris cross country season 2022-23. A great achievement!

## Junior Judge

Well done to Maisy Kate Martin (Huishinish, Aird Tong) on winning the junior section of the Lewis and Harris Sheep Producers Association's stock judging night at the Stornoway Mart in February. She knows a good thing when she sees it!

## Player of the Month

Congratulations to Shana Macphail on being named Stirling University WFC's player of the month for February.

We also send our best wishes to Kenny and Anne Macphail (Sarnia, Tong Park) as they have moved to Perthshire for a new adventure. We hope to see you home on holiday soon.



▶ Calum Macrae Graduation

▶ Maisy Kate Martin

▶▶ Ryan Weatherston

## Also in the News

### Lucky Escape

There was a lucky escape for Gordon's on Sunday 12 March when the back-up generator caught fire during an island-wide power outage. Despite an alarming amount of noise and smoke, the damage could have been a lot worse, and the shop and forecourt were otherwise unaffected. On their Facebook page, staff thanked the quick response of the Stornoway Fire Brigade.



Gordon's ▲

### Back Piper to Compete in Donald Macleod Competition

James Duncan Mackenzie from Back will be among the competitors at this year's Donald Macleod piping competition, the first time it's been held since before the COVID-19 pandemic.



Donald Macleod ▲

The prestigious day-long event, which sees eight of the best pipers in the world invited to Stornoway for the competition honouring the musical legacy of PM Donald Macleod, returns to the Caladh Inn on Friday 7 April.

The eight pipers invited to take part in this year's PM Donald Macleod Memorial Competition are William McCallum, Angus D. MacColl, Callum Beaumont, Finlay Johnston, Connor Sinclair, Fred Morrison, Glenn Brown and James Duncan Mackenzie.

The competition, inaugurated in 1994 by the late Piper Major Iain M. Morrison (mac Eona) and the late Angus Stewart (*Dodo*), is in three sections: piobareachd, march, Strathspey and reel (MSR); and Hornpipe and Jig.

For the morning's section, each piper has been allocated one of the 27 piobareachds composed by Donald Macleod. For the MSR section, the pipers are asked to play two marches, two Strathspeys and two reels, and one of each has to be a composition of Donald Macleods. To round off the day, the pipers are asked to play a hornpipe and jig of their choice.

### Flight Cancellations

Due to HIAL industrial action, Loganair have taken the decision to temporarily suspend services from Inverness to Stornoway, Benbecula, Kirkwall and Sumburgh, and between Kirkwall and Sumburgh due to the industrial action. Starting on Friday 17 March up to and including 30 April, no Loganair services will fly from the islands to Inverness. This could be extended into May.

### Comhairle Sets Budget

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has set its Budget for 2023/24. The Comhairle is facing an estimated budget deficit of £6.4m for the forthcoming financial year and has agreed measures comprising a mixture of savings and the use of reserves to deal with the deficit. The Scottish Government Financial Settlement, together with ring fenced commitments, pay awards and significant inflationary pressures, means a further reduction in the amount of money the Comhairle has to spend on services.

The budget papers are available on the Comhairle Budgets webpage.

Council Tax has been increased by 5%, an increase of £61.46 or £1.18 per week at Band D.

## Project Neptune



Two amendments were not successful and the budget went through as per the recommendations.

As part of Transport Scotland's ongoing review of the Clyde and Hebrides ferry services, the Ferries Community Board has recently been engaging with local communities throughout the Clyde and Hebrides Ferry Services network. The main points for discussion have been the ongoing issues with the current ferry service and what can be done to ensure that a first-rate ferry service can be delivered to the communities in these areas. The points raised in these meetings will be collated and a report submitted to Transport Scotland by the Chair of the Ferries Community Board, Angus Campbell. If you would like your views to be included in this report, on an anonymous basis, you can email them to Angus Campbell [anguscampbell8@outlook.com](mailto:anguscampbell8@outlook.com)



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# Comann Eachdraidh Sgìre a' Bhac

## Back Historical Society Update

We have very exciting news to report this month: our new modular building is now complete! This is a huge step in the Comann Eachdraidh's progress and we look forward to welcoming you all to our new temporary home in the very near future. The building will shortly be delivered from Errol in Perthshire to its location on the old school site. That site will soon be a much-changed place with the recent addition of the Community Council's polycarbonate tunnel.

The last couple of months have also been very busy regarding advancing our proposed permanent Heritage Community Hub project. As was mentioned in our February Cebac report, we were successful in our application to the 'Community Led Local Development' (CLLD) fund. The timescales for applying to this, and then completing the work were exceptionally tight, and we were fortunate to have assistance with the process from architect Ruairidh Moir of BARD (and Tolsta). Although we were awarded only some of the sum applied for, it was enough to allow a planning application for the building to be submitted at RIBA stage 3. Now the big challenge is working towards, and finding, capital funding.

On a related note, we are investigating how best to buy the old school site and bring it into community ownership. We will keep you informed of progress and will seek your views.

In January, our first talk of 2023 was presented by Roddy Murray, Coll and An Lanntair. His subject was *Looking Down, Looking Back*, looking at aerial photos of the district in the 1960s. A large crowd enjoyed the talk and there was much chat in reaction to the images. Our next talk will be presented by Dr D.U. Stiùbhart. The date of the talk will be announced when the Skye-Tarbert ferry is back in operation; Dòmhnall lives in Skye, and the ferry disruption has meant that the talk could not be given earlier in the year.

Two of us have enjoyed working with Tong and Back primary schools on their emigration projects, culminating in the performance to be held in the Upper Coll Centre on 21 March. We are also grateful to the guests who helped with these sessions, Murdo Macleod (*Maroot*) and Mrs Annabel Macleod, whose fathers left on the *Metagama*; and Torquil Crichton, whose grandfather emigrated on the *Metagama* but joined the ship in Glasgow; also Captain Calum Maclean, who has made the voyage to Montreal and the St Lawrence River many times during his career at sea. The children were also interested to see Captain Maclean's compass and sextant.

In April, we look forward to welcoming 'Metagama children' who are coming from Detroit to join in the centenary commemorations. We hope to hold an evening that will include Coinneach Maciver in conversation with Peggy Morrison, daughter of John Maciver (*Uilleagean*) 41 Coll, John Macleod, son of Donald Macleod (*Dollan Loudie*), 4 Vatisker, and also the son of Donald Mackenzie (*an Geamhradh*, who is one of those mentioned in *Oran a' Mhetagama*) 51 Coll. All these men left Lewis on 21 April 1923.

In the March issue of *Loch a Tuath News*, I am sure many readers enjoyed the new Gaelic feature telling the story behind some well-known and well-used Gaelic proverbs. The first *abairt* featured was the colourful '*A h-uile càil na àite fhèin 's a' phoit-mhùin air an dreasair*'.

***Mur a bheil sibh comhshurtail a' sgrìobhadh na Gàidhlig, leigibh fios gu abaire@cebac.org agus gheibh sinn cuideigin airson na h-abairtean agaibh a chlàradh.***

Next month marks the fifth anniversary of the rebirth of the Comann Eachdraidh, and much has been achieved in that time, including three books (*Gaisgich Sgìre a' Bhac, The Heroes of Back District 1914-1919, 1939-1945; The Gress and Upper Coll Land Raids 1919-1922; and Nine Archaeological Walks in Sgìre a' Bhac*, the last following on from a summer series of walks). In addition to that, we had input into Bill Lawson's *Vatisker Croft History*, an inaugural annual, interaction with local schools, videos with members of the community, public talks, helping members of the public at home and abroad with genealogy queries, and not forgetting our new modular building, where I am sure much will happen.

Some of the original committee members are stepping down from their roles at the next AGM, including our chair and our treasurer, and we really need more willing volunteers to join us to continue preserving our heritage. If you are interested or feel you can offer something, please do come to the AGM, which will be held in May.

A.T.



## Outstanding Contribution Award

Six new recipients of the Sàr Ghàidheal Fellowship have been honoured for their outstanding contribution to the Gaelic language and its culture at a special event at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, which is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year.

The six new members of the Sàr Ghàidheal Fellowship are: the late Lachie Gillies and Cathy MacDonald who were named Sàr Ghàidheal in 2020; Donalda MacKinnon and Duncan Ferguson (2021); and Julie Fowlis and Kenneth MacIver (2022).

Kenneth MacIver, or Coinneach Mòr as he is best known, is a household name across Gaelic-speaking communities having presented his popular topical radio programme 'Prògram Choinnich' for 29 years on BBC Radio nan Gàidheal.

The Chair of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig's Board of Directors, Angus MacLeod, said: 'Sabhal Mòr Ostaig is honoured to be able to recognise the contributions of these six "Sàr Ghàidheil" who have done so much for the language and its culture. We were especially pleased that we could



Coinneach Mor second from right after receiving his award ▲

gather in person once more to present the awards.

'Three of those who received the Sàr Ghàidheal award have made outstanding contributions to Gaelic through highly successful careers in broadcasting, which is most appropriate this year as the BBC commemorates 100 years of Gaelic broadcasting.'

All episodes are available to view now on the BBC iPlayer.

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Look out for the hairy coo bus!

# Back FC

## Back FC: 2023 Season Preview

Under new management this season, Back FC will be looking to capitalise on last season's Jock Stein and Lewis (Moldova) cup successes and improve their fourth-place league position. Speaking to *LATN*, one of the new managers, David Maciver, told us that 'the boys will be looking to keep up the momentum from last season, focusing particularly on the league'. Key to their success will be player availability, which caused the side a significant problem last season. 'We have added a few new players to the team, and retained some experience to help us through times when some of the younger lads will still be at uni and working away'. With key midfielder Stevie Mutch going to be unavailable for a large chunk of the season, along with Calum 'Govig' MacIennan and young defender Jamie Macdonald, who had a breakthrough season with the seniors last year, the Blues have added Stuart MacIennan (right wing) and Lewis Brett (centre/right back) to their ranks. Also making comebacks are Chris 'Moley' Macleod (forward/midfield), who has been out injured for a long spell, Craig Macleod (left back), Scott Macleod from United (midfield) and veteran defender David Maclean, who has spent the last few seasons with Ness. Also returning in goals are Michael 'Peel' Maciver and James Macleod, although James will probably not feature in the early part of the season as he continues to recover from a broken foot, the result of a freak accident during winter training.

'Most of the U18s we have in the squad have had the experience of a full season with the seniors, so we are expecting them to continue to gain in confidence and step up to the challenge,' added the new manager. 'They will play a key part in the team

## SENIOR FIXTURES

14 April Carloway v Back  
(League)

24 April Back v Carloway  
(Jock Stein Cup Rd 2)

28 April Back v United  
(League)

1 May Back/Carloway v Harris/Point  
(Jock Stein Cup Semi-final)

5 May Lochs v Back  
(League)

8 May Eilean Fhraoich 1st Rd 1st Leg



again, as we continue to build strength in the side'.

Back's first match is a league fixture away to Carloway on 14 April. Winning the first round bye in the Eilean an Fhraoich cup, Back won't feature until the semi-finals, slated to be played on 19 June. At the time of going to press, the Highland Amateur draw had yet to be made. Keep an eye on the Back FC Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages for all the action. C'mon the Blues!

### Co-op Cup Draw

The draw for the 2023 Co-op Cup has been made. Back have drawn Benbecula and will play at Upper Coll on 10 June.

### Not Him Again!

History re-Pete-d itself down at the Back Bowls as Peter O'Donnell took the league title for the second year in a row. Unlike last year, though, this one went right to the wire as Billy Nelson ensured the title would not be won until the last bowls trickled their way down the green carpet.

He may have been top of the league since Christmas, but this year it was a lot, lot closer than before. Mark Macdonald's challenge faded with the snow, while James Macleod let a few games slip from his grasp, which proved costly. Billy Nelson, however, kept his charge going and was never far away from the big man. Going into the last night, he just needed Peter to slip up once so he could pounce and take the title.

With one match left, Billy was 2 points behind Peter. If Peter lost, then Billy would win as he had a better shot difference. Billy's team for the last match included James Macleod and Malky Macleod: a strong trio surely? Well, we all thought so too until they were 8-0 down after the first few ends. Meanwhile, Peter was 8-1 up and he was on the phone to order some more Brasso.

Congratulations to Peter and just a reminder that no-one has won the title more than twice in a row, so next season should



## Back Bowls

be an exciting one.

The following week it was singles night. Fear not dear wives, it was not that kind of night, just a night to see which bowler would rise to claim the coveted singles title. Sixteen brave men came forward and one by one they were whittled away until only one remained.

James Macleod was on fire as he demolished player after player, including a semi-final thrashing of league champion Peter O'Donnell. On a tough side of the draw, he looked to be the one to beat. Meanwhile, on the other side, Duncan Maclean took an

early scalp as last year's finalist Billy Nelson took the early bus home. In his semi-final Duncan scraped home against Malky Macleod.

The final was a cracker and had the crowd (well all 10 of us) completely enthralled. Just like the league, it went down to the very last bowls and what a couple of bowls they were. With the game level, Duncan drew his last bowl close to the jack and lay shot. All James had to do was the same and he did... then he didn't. His bowl looked perfect all the way down, but as we all rose to applaud the shot of the match it agonisingly rolled an inch or two further away and left the shot and the title to Duncan. The old man was back and somewhere in that grumpy body of his a smile was surely brewing. If he just stays away from escalators he could be back to his best next season!



# Sgoil a' Bhac

## Euroquiz

Well done to our Euroquiz Team who attended the regional heat in Stornoway Primary School on 9 March. Amy Anderson, Eva Macphail, Ava Scaramuccia and Lachlan Macdonald all worked so hard, along with their teachers, to prepare for this year's Euroquiz. The quiz consisted of four rounds (Geography and History, Foreign Languages, Culture and European Affairs and General Knowledge) and was tough. There was a real competitive air across all the schools who were participating. Well done to Stornoway Primary School who won, but we were hugely delighted to come second equal and to have had the opportunity to participate in this fantastic competition.

## Awards

Gaelic Speaker of the Month certificates for February were awarded to Esther Macleod GP1-2, Osker Iversen EP1-2, Emma Macleod GP3-5, Lucas Campbell EP3-5, Katie Anderson GP6-7 and Angus Macritchie EP5-7. 'S math a rinn sibh!

Our February Achievers of the Month were also awarded their certificates. Our pupils have done so well in so many different areas of school life and we love to see their pleasure in receiving their certificates.

## Cross Country

Congratulations to our U11 girls' team and our U11 boys' team for winning this year's cross-country prizes. We are also extremely excited that we won the first Participation Award, with an impressive 34% of our pupils taking part in the race series. Gregor MacPhail achieved second overall and Josh Macleod third overall in the Boys' U11. Ava Scaramuccia achieved second overall and Lilly Scaramuccia third overall in the Girls' U11. Very well done to all who participated. (See the back page for photos.)

## World Book Day

It was all go in Sgoil a' Bhac for World Book Day. Aside of children and staff dressing up as some of their favourite characters from books there were lots of literacy activities going on in each class and across the school. A great time was had by all.

## Meanbh-chuileag

Anns a' Ghearain fhuair Gàidhlig 3-7 cothrom dealbh-chluich ùr Meanbh chuileag, "Sgeulachdan an Tilley," fhaicinn anns an sgoil.

## Science Fair

Some of our pupils and staff went along to the Science Fair on 11 March in the Town Hall. There was lots to see and do. Everything from dinosaurs to chocolate welding, coding with Ozobots, using digital microscopes, making your own shampoo/conditioner, learning all about drones and the science of hearing and much more. There were lots of participants, with a wide range of activities, including a big Velcro skeleton puzzle and the game Operation, DIY modelling of parts of the body using balloons for the lungs and understanding of blood transfusions.

Maisie GP7- 'It was fun, it was very, very crowded. I liked making conditioner and there were lots of things to see and do, it was just very exciting'.

Lucas EP3 - 'I liked doing the puzzle, so I had to use the telescope and then I had to put the puzzle together. My daddy had to help me there was like a million pieces, it felt impossible, but mummy and I managed to fix it. I also



Gaelic speakers of the month (Feb)



February achievers



Euroquiz team



loved catching the Lego robots, it got mixed up and fell off the table’.

Liam EP4 – ‘I have two favourite things, my first favourite thing was when we scanned my hand because it was cool. My second favourite thing was using the microscope to find out the dandelions are actually green. I also really enjoyed chocolate welding, my bridge lasted’.

**Eco Week**

During the school Eco week, EP3-5 and GP1-2 went for a beach clean on 9 March. Conall (EP5) shared the experience of what we did: ‘We went to Vatisker beach and we had a bunch of plastic bags to pick up rubbish on the beach. We found metal which we picked up as well as a variety of plastic’. Marsaili (EP5) added that we partnered everyone up with pupils from GP1-2 and we picked up lots of fizzy juice cans.

**Community Walk**

Pupils from the rainbow room took part in a community walk to identify important areas that make up our community and where we live.



**Arnol Blackhouse Visit**

EP1/2 recently went on a trip to the Arnol Blackhouse. They are learning about the olden days. They enjoyed looking at all the old artefacts and finding out what they were used for.

**Unihoc**

Many of our P6/7 pupils took part in the unihoc festival held in the Stornoway Sports Centre. They thoroughly enjoyed the event.



▲ Arnol Blackhouse visit



▲ Maisie and Rebecca - STEM fair



▲ Unihoc festival

# Homecoming 2023: Special Series

## The *Metagama*: A Ship's History

As the 100th anniversary of the day the SS *Metagama* left Stornoway, bound for Canada, with 315 Lewis emigrants on board approaches, we look at the ship and the passenger list from the day she sailed, 21 April 1923. Much has been written about the departure of Lewis men and women from Stornoway on board the *Metagama* in 1923; for this reason, what follows looks at other aspects of the liner's history.

The *Metagama* (a Native American word meaning 'where the waters meet') was one of the fleet of Canadian Pacific liners that maintained the service between Great Britain and Canada during the inter-war years, carrying thousands of immigrants from every corner of the British Isles and further afield to settle in Canada. In addition, the *Metagama*, which undertook her maiden voyage during the First World War, carried

legions of Canadian volunteers across the Atlantic, while still maintaining a wartime commercial service. She then went on to serve for many years as one of the most memorable immigrant ships of the inter-war years, also becoming known as the 'Bride Ship,' earning a memorable place in the lives and memories of many on both sides of the Atlantic.

The *Metagama* was built by Barclay Curle & Co Ltd, Glasgow in 1914 for Canadian Pacific Line. She was a ship of 12,420 gross tons, length 500.4ft x beam 64.2ft, with two funnels, two masts and twin screws driving her at a speed of 15 knots. As a point of comparison, the present-day MV *Loch Seaforth* is about 120 m long, so the *Metagama* was about a quarter as long again.

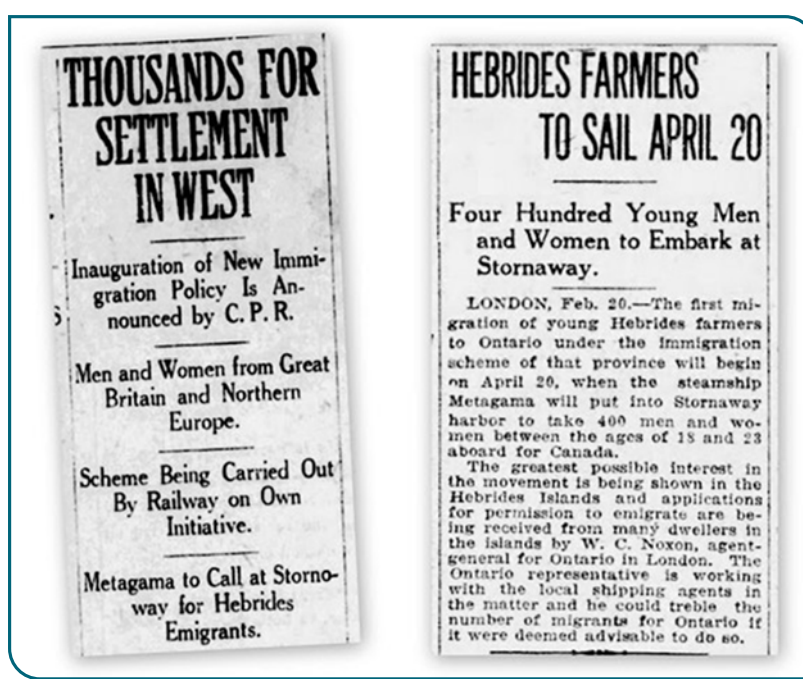
There was accommodation for 520 cabins and 1200 third-class passengers. She was launched on 19 November 1914, and sailed from Liverpool on her maiden voyage to St John, New Brunswick (NB), on 26 March 1915. She was one of the first ocean liners designed to carry 'cabin class', rather than the more well-off first- and second-class passengers.

She made her first voyage after the Armistice on 20 November 1918; in March 1922 she started sailing between Glasgow and St John, NB. Her duties done in repatriating Canadian soldiers to their 'home and native land', the *Metagama* began what would be her most long-lived work: bringing a new generation of immigrants to the Dominion.

In 1923, Canadian Pacific Railway's General Agricultural Agent announced a new immigration scheme to bring out thousands of farm labourers and domestic servants to the farms of Western Canada. The immigrants would come



A side-on photograph of the vessel ▲



◀◀ 1923  
Passenger  
List

◀ News  
clips

from Great Britain, Ireland, Switzerland, Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium. It was also announced that the first migration of young farmers from the Hebrides to Ontario under a provincial settlement scheme would begin when the *Metagama* would put into Stornoway Harbour to take 400 men and women between the age of 18 and 23 years to Canada.

During her career the *Metagama* was involved in only two serious accidents. In May 1923 she collided with the Hogarth Line steamer *Baron Vernon* in the Clyde. As reported in the *Scotsman*:

the *Baron Vernon* was grounded deliberately by her captain near the Garmoyle light to prevent her sinking as she was holed beneath the water line. She was never re-floated. The *Metagama* was bound for Quebec and had 1100 emigrants on board and was on her way to Belfast to collect more. She sustained very little damage apart from a dent supposed to have been caused by the anchor of the other ship. She returned up the Clyde to Prince's dock and was checked out before making another Atlantic crossing.

Only a year later she was involved in yet another collision, this time with another cargo vessel. The *Canadian Gazette* reported on 19 June 1924 that:

the bows of the *Clara Camus* were driven back to the foremast and the forehold flooded. Her starboard side was holed amidships, and the forward stokehold flooded. The crew of the *Clara Camus* say the collision occurred at ten o'clock in the morning in a dense fog and they allege that their vessel had stopped because of the fog. She was struck by the *Metagama* when passing with a tremendous impact. There were no casualties on either vessel as a result of the collision. However, three sailors in a small boat launched from the *Metagama* to assess the damage drifted away in the fog and have not been found. The *Metagama* had over 1100 passengers on board and was badly holed.

Severely damaged and taking on water faster than her pumps could manage, the *Metagama* was in a precarious situation. Capt. Henderson saved the ship by flooding the portside ballast tanks creating a 35-degree list to port to lift the holed starboard side sufficiently clear to let the pumps do their best, whilst the ship made for St. John's, Newfoundland, 70 miles away. Fortunately, the sea calmed out and she made good headway whilst passengers remained on deck, in lifejackets, barely able to stand owing to the list. She had some 14-ft. of water in her stokehold by the time she reached port.

Cool-headed action on the part of the *Metagama's* officers averted a panic aboard the craft when the passengers rushed for the decks after the force of the collision had sent the craft reeling. Further cool-headed action under the supervision of the officers, while the water poured into the forward stokehold, resulted in the filling of the port side ballast tanks and subsequent listing of the injured starboard side out of the water. The ensuing thirty degree list to port resulted in reducing the flow of water into the hold and made it possible for the pumps to keep up the unequal struggle until the liner was safely beached.

Passengers highly praised captain, officers and seamen for the handling of the situation as they found their way ashore. During the long race one seaman, a skilled piper had provided music with a set of bagpipes, the ship's string band played continuous impromptu concerts, and phonographs had been pressed into service on the vessel's tilted decks to help maintain the courage of those aboard".

The *Belfast Telegraph* reported that the same year she had an on-board fire in the month of November:

Whilst in the Firth of Clyde, smoke was seen issuing from no. 6 hold, containing a quantity of rubber tyres and 200

| DATE OF ARRIVAL | SHIP              | MASTER    | PORT OF REGISTRY | REG. TONNAGE | WHENCE ARRIVED | CARGO LAUNDED  |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------|------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1923            |                   |           |                  |              |                |                |
| Oct 10          | <i>Explora</i> ½  |           |                  |              | Landing        | 600            |
|                 | <i>Edison</i> ½   | Lumington | Norway           | 36           | Liverpool      | Coal ✓ 100     |
| 10              | <i>Thula</i> ½    | Lameron   | Glasgow          | 97           | Kyle           | Wool ✓ 800     |
| 11              | <i>Thula</i> ½    | Lameron   | Glasgow          | 97           | Kyle           | Wool ✓         |
| 12              | <i>Thula</i> ½    | Lameron   | Glasgow          | 97           | Kyle           | Wool ✓         |
| 13              | <i>Thula</i> ½    | Lameron   | Glasgow          | 97           | Kyle           | Wool ✓         |
| 13              | <i>Thula</i> ½    | Lameron   | Glasgow          | 97           | Kyle           | Wool ✓         |
| 15              | <i>Glenaise</i> ½ | Mc Calum  | Belfast          | 512          | East Coast     | Coal ✓ 1000    |
| 16              | <i>Rosie</i> ½    | Lumington | Norwich          | 7            | Wine           | Coal ✓ 1000    |
| 17              | <i>Thula</i> ½    | Lameron   | Glasgow          | 97           | Kyle           | Wool ✓ 800     |
| 17              | <i>Abasco</i> ½   | Boyd      | Glasgow          | 115          | Glasgow        | General ✓      |
| 17              | <i>Thula</i> ½    | Lameron   | Glasgow          | 97           | Kyle           | Wool ✓         |
| 18              | <i>Ellen</i> ½    | Macdonald | Norway           | 42           |                | 800            |
| 18              | <i>Thula</i> ½    | Lameron   | Glasgow          | 97           | Kyle           | Wool ✓ 800     |
| 18              | <i>Bar</i> ½      | Mc Calum  | Norway           | 39           | Glasgow        | Coal ✓ 800     |
| 19              | <i>Thula</i> ½    | Lameron   | Glasgow          | 97           | Kyle           | Wool ✓ 800     |
| 20              | <i>Thula</i> ½    | Lameron   | Glasgow          | 97           | Kyle           | Wool ✓         |
| 20              | <i>Bar</i> ½      | Mc Calum  | Norway           | 39           | Glasgow        | Coal ✓ 800     |
| 21              | <i>Thula</i> ½    | Lameron   | Glasgow          | 97           | Kyle           | Wool ✓         |
| 21              | <i>Metagama</i> ½ | Munhall   | London           | 7655         | Glasgow        | 1000           |
| 21              | <i>Glenaise</i> ½ | Mc Calum  | Belfast          | 512          | Belfast        | General ✓      |
| 23              | <i>Abasco</i> ½   | Boyd      | Glasgow          | 115          | Glasgow        | General ✓ 1000 |

Stornoway ▲  
harbour log 1923

Metagama ►  
leaving  
Stornoway



bales of hay. The crew injected steam into the hold which seemed to have quenched the blaze. When the ship made it to Prince's Dock, Glasgow, the fire brigade was called. When the hatch to the hold was lifted, dense volumes of black smoke issued forth and the fire had well retaken hold. The firemen had great difficulty in getting at the seat of the fire in the 30-ft. deep hold. It was, at one point, feared the fire would spread to the Third Class dining saloon which was immediately above the 'tween deck. During the night, the *Metagama* took a serious list to starboard owing to volumes of water used to fight the blaze, but this was countered by emptying some of the ballast tanks on that side of the ship. The ship's list at one point was sufficient to snap one of the forward moorings and slowly righting herself, she eventually settled on the muddy bottom of the dock.



After her collision with the *Baron Vernon* on the Clyde ▲

Also in 1927, the *Scotsman* claimed that:

the largest number of families leaving from Scotland to Canada on any one ship this year will leave on the CP liner *Metagama*. There are 54 families in all sailing under the 3000 families scheme and a few under the nominated families scheme. There was also a party of 50 single young men who are going to guaranteed jobs with Canadian farmers. These men were traveling under the £2 fare scheme as were 59 female domestic workers. Also included were 20 Scottish girls on their way to join their prospective husbands. This is said to be the largest number of brides that have left Scotland on one ship.

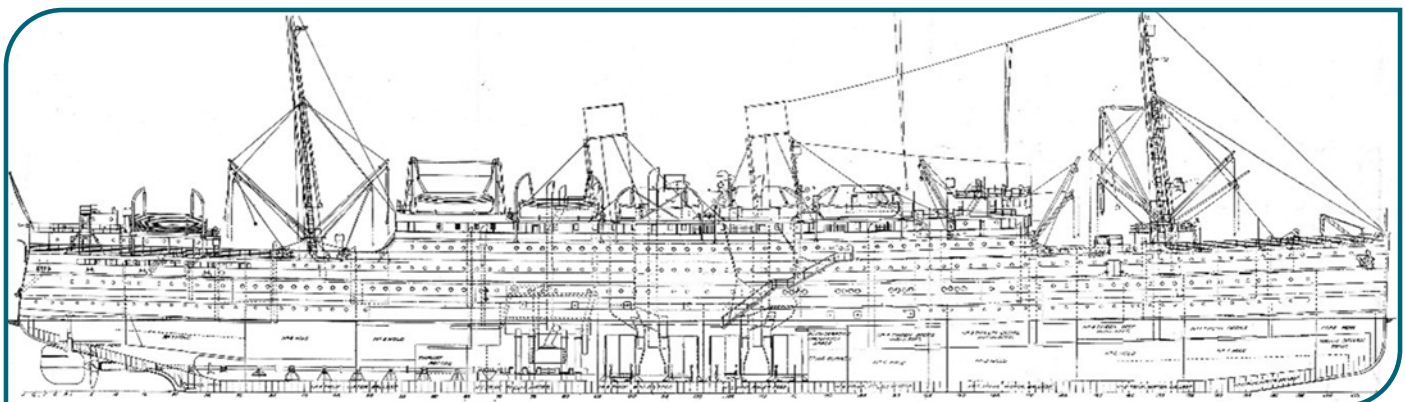
By 1930 the Great Depression had reduced transatlantic passenger loads so much that she was no longer needed and was laid up. The *Glasgow Herald* reported in 1934 'that the famous "Bride Ship" of the Atlantic had been sold to a Glasgow firm and is to be broken up...It was claimed that on every transatlantic crossing at least one crew member was competent at playing the bagpipes'.

She made her last transatlantic crossing in 1930, from Antwerp and Southampton to Quebec and Montreal. By that time, the *Metagama* had made 151 round voyages across the Atlantic; during that time she had carried 153,452 passengers and approximately 36,000 troops. She was then laid up at Southend until finally being towed to be broken up at Bo'ness on the Firth of Forth.

There are few, if any, descriptions of life and conditions on board the *Metagama*, but the photographs of the interior give an idea of the accommodation the emigrants would have lived in during their voyages. The deck plans illustrate the number of cabins and the large dining areas on the lower decks of the ship.

The *Metagama* was a ship that only made one visit to the Isle of Lewis, but it has gained a huge place in our island's history. Other ships took many more island emigrants across the Atlantic, but this is the ship that we choose to remember. Few ships worked harder and figured more in their trade, and in the memories of her passengers who embarked in her to start new lives in a distant land.

*With thanks to Colin Tucker and other contributors for the text and photographs.*



Third-class cabin



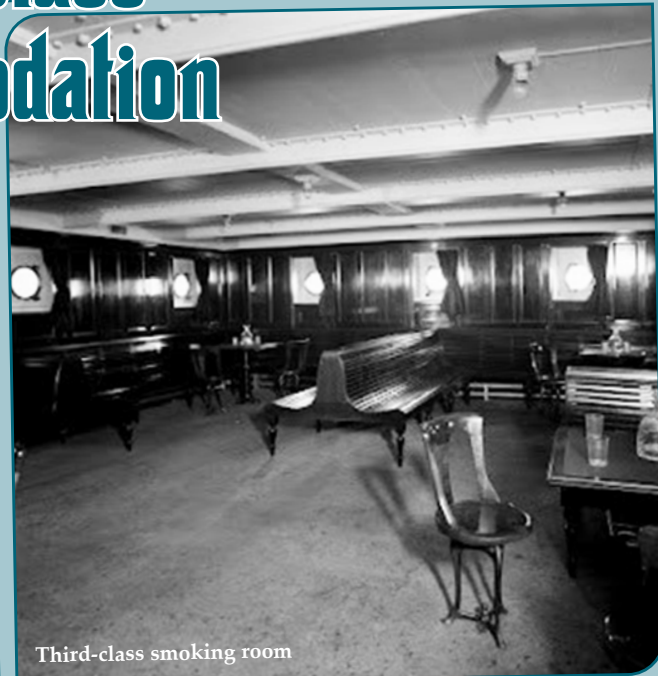
Third-class dining room



## Third Class Accommodation



Third-class ladies saloon



Third-class smoking room

## A Metagama Experience: Murdo Graham (*Murchadh Phico*), 20 Coll

Murdo departed on the *Metagama* on an 'assisted passage' and, as such, was believed to have been contracted to work on a farm in Southern Ontario for a year, to repay the fare from his wages. It is not known exactly how long he stayed, but he soon moved on across the border to Chicago in the USA. Murdo worked in the building trade during the time when skyscrapers were being erected in Chicago and through the era of Al Capone who was operating in the city where Murdo worked.

Murdo remained in employment right through the years of the Great Depression in America. This enabled him to, at times, assist some of his less fortunate friends who had lost their jobs. He sent much of his savings home to be invested in the croft in Coll, which he was expected to inherit. He returned to Lewis in 1935 to see his father, who was poorly, and had intended to return to America. However, a few months later, he married Dolina (*Dollag*) Stewart (d. 1982), also from Coll, on 27 November 1935. The wedding was held in Glasgow.

They then returned home to Lewis, living first on the family croft at 20 Coll, then on Kenneth Street, Stornoway until 1943, before

Murdo Graham (second from right) with friends. ►





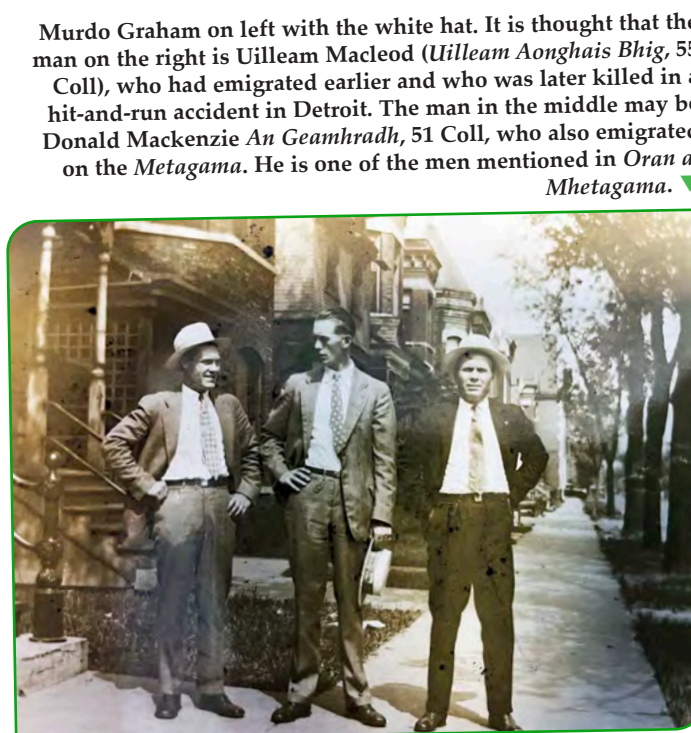
Murdo Graham in the driving seat. ▲

settling at 18 Westview Terrace, where the family still live today. Murdo worked as a warper in Newhall's Mill for the remainder of his life and was presented in 1963 with an engraved Gold Rolex Oyster Watch for 21 years of faithful service, which was left to his grandson.

Murdo never returned to America but his time there had a lasting influence on him. He retained a slight Yankee accent, and his best clothes and hats were always from America, sent to him from Chicago by his brother Angus. He died in 1968 in Stornoway, survived by four children, Annie, Johnina, Donald (*Dodes*) and Christine.

*Contributed by Stewart Graham (Murdo's grandson)*

**Footnote:** As can be read in CEBac's Back in Time annual 2023, Murdo's wife Dolina Stewart, 76 Coll, was the sister of John Stewart *Seonaidh Aonghais Dhòmhnail Ruaidh*, who wrote the song *Oran a' Mhetagama*, realising that the ship was taking away many of the young of the village and he may never see them again.



Murdo Graham on left with the white hat. It is thought that the man on the right is Uilleam Macleod (*Uilleam Aonghais Bhig*, 55 Coll), who had emigrated earlier and who was later killed in a hit-and-run accident in Detroit. The man in the middle may be Donald Mackenzie *An Geamhradh*, 51 Coll, who also emigrated on the *Metagama*. He is one of the men mentioned in *Oran a' Mhetagama*. ▼



# Tong School

Emigration has been a key focus for learning this term. The culmination of our learning will be the Dileab community concert held to commemorate the centenary of the sailing of the *Metagama*. A selection of thought-provoking pieces of writing which explore the emotions of migrants is included for readers to enjoy.

## Letters Home

*Mo Mhàthair,*

I am writing to let you know that I have arrived safely in Canada. The journey has taken eleven days. I remember you at the pier. I felt guilty. My eyes were booming with tears like waves just like someone on a swing. My heart was beating just like a hurricane hit my heart. I just felt lonely, so, so lonely. I miss my family.

The journey—oh, OH the journey! The journey took forever but it was worth it. I got very sick. I was so sad but I did not give up. The waves were crashing so much and I felt cianalas. I wish I did not have cianalas. On the sea it was cold and wet with westerly winds and sea swell.

I am working on the prairie. All I can see are the sheep and cattle. I wish I could just go back home. I cannot hold my tears in. The people are so nice and gentle to me but I miss my old life so

much. The weather is so nice and calm. I love it so much! There are amazing crofters here. The sky is so blue. The grass is green. It looks better than it did at home but I miss my croft and beach.

*Le Gaol,*

*Murchadh (By Eloise, P3)*

*Mo Mhàthair,*

I am writing to let you know that I have arrived safely in Canada. The journey has taken eleven days. I remember you at the pier. I felt like I was in the westerly waves. I felt homesick, worried and fearful that my family would forget me. My eyes were bounding with tears because they were tearing piece by piece. My eyes were drooping. My tears were falling like the westerly waves. My heart BROKE DOWN into tears. My heart felt strange, my tongue felt strange. It was because I was saying my last goodbye. Curiously, I tried to puzzle out why I was actually going to Canada. Sadly, I stepped into the small boat to get to the *Metagama*. I don't think you know how sad I am. I'm as sad as can be. I'm as sad as an owl howling in the heavy, dark, steep night. I'm as sad as a broken, hurt, devastated, down-hearted frozen man.

Oh, the journey, oh, the journey. I had the most luxurious cabin in the boat. The food was delicious. I loved it. I was having a good old chat with some friends. We were chatting in Gaelic. But it was very strange. I saw birds soaring outside. I was so scared because I thought it would crash like the Iolaire.

I am working on the prairie. All I can see is sheep and cattle. The people are kind. I miss Donald and you, Mum. It is so hot but I have heard other people tell me that it is freezing in the winter. There is no beach. I miss the beach and the croft at home.

*Le Gaol,*

*Murchadh (By Ariana, P4)*

*Mo Mhàthair,*

I am writing to tell you that I have arrived safely in Canada. The journey has taken eleven days. I remember you at the pier. I felt like the island was breaking like a broken puzzle piece. My eyes were flowing with tears like a waterfall from the Amazon Rainforest. My heart was erupting like an avalanche falling and rumbling. The boat was slowly flowing across the Atlantic Ocean like an eagle flying smoothly above the water.

The journey was long, rough and tiring. I loved all the people singing in Gaelic and talking in Gaelic. The food was brilliant. It was better than the food at home. I was writing poems on the way to Canada. I was having a ceilidh with my friends on the ship. I was thinking about you, the island and my own home on the whole journey.

I am working on the prairie. All I can see in my mind are the people waving the boat goodbye. The people were dripping with tears. I miss the island and the sound of the waves streaming onto the shore. The weather was thundery and rainy. The wind was howling so much that it felt like there were two billion or more wolves on the massive boat.

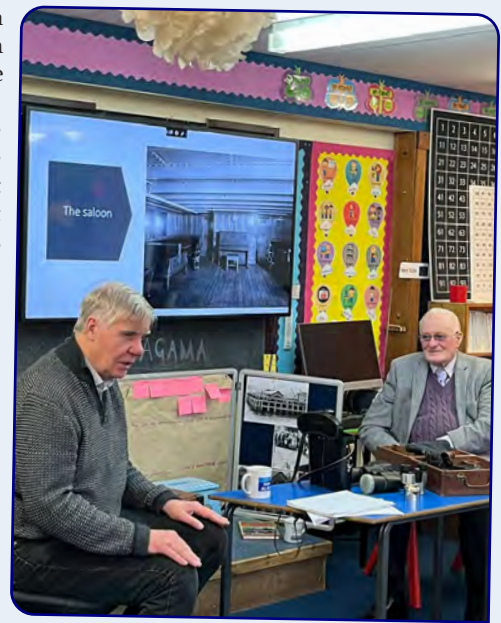
*Le Gaol,*

*Murchadh (By Aaron, P4)*

### My Journey on the S.S. Metagama

On 21 April 1923, I was leaving my island home for Canada. I felt heartbroken that I was leaving all the people I grew up with but felt most sad about leaving my family. This day for me was very gloomy and when it was time for me to go I saw pretty much everyone that lived in Stornoway. I was tearful but also excited for the new adventure ahead. I recognised nearly everyone there. The pier was hoaching with people, I had never seen the town so busy! I was so sad as a fish getting caught in a trap leaving my beloved Isle of Lewis. I could hear sobbing from families getting broken up and waving their goodbyes. I was getting on the small boats and said my final goodbye to my loved ones which was so emotional. The *Metagama* was too big to pick us up from the pier so it sent out little boats to get onboard. I felt nervous and my heart was racing. I could hear singing in the distance. The water was very rough on the way out to the *Metagama*. I waved goodbye to my dear island and loved ones and tears ran down my face.

When I was on the boat there was a service onboard and the Gàidhlig psalm singing was as beautiful as a rose. The boat was a lot fancier than I expected. The ride was very rough and it made a lot of people unwell and I was one of them, unfortunately. We thought it would take seven days to reach but it took eleven long days. It was as cold as a snowball onboard. I got a Bible that I used a lot and I reflected each day. The food was a lot better than the raw herring that some Polish passengers were eating. For most of the time I was not eating because a lot of people were as sick as dogs. I was also extremely homesick and the smell sometimes just made me vomit unexpectedly. The waves crashed ferociously on the side of the boat and made bangs as loud as dynamite exploding. Finally, we got word that we were almost there, thankfully. I didn't know how much longer I could have lasted on the high seas of sickness.



Mr Maciver and Captain Maclean ▲ sharing information about the Metagama

Finally, when we arrived in Canada I was amazed at the sights before my eyes. When we came off the boat I felt nervous and an ambulance had to be called for someone because he had not eaten for eleven days! Then, Canadian men started calling out surnames and the farms we were going to. I felt as though I was in the line forever, it was so slow and the time passed slowly. While I was waiting in the line I got very nervous like a person going to a job interview. It was going to be sad leaving people I had become friends with onboard the *Metagama*. The journey to the farm was enjoyable as I saw lots of things I had never seen before. When I got to the farm I opened the door and I got breeze of fresh cold air, which was a lot better than the smoke in our black house back home. I didn't know what was ahead of me but I was excited and nervous at the same time...

*By Calum, GM 6*

### Am Metagama

'S e ceud bliadhna bhon a dh' fhalbh bàta mòr à cidhe Steòrnabhagh. 'B e ainm a bhàta Am Metagama. 'B e bàta mòr a bh' innte, còr is dà dheug mìle tuna a' chuideam. Ceud gu leth metre a dh' fhaid. Dh' fhaodadh i a' ghabhail còr is mìle agus sia ceud luchd siubhail. Chaidh a' bhàta air a dheanamh ann an Glaschu, ann an naoi deug ceitheir deug. 'S ann leis a Chanadian Pacific Railway a bha am Metagama. Bha an bàta a' siubhal eadar Glaschu agus Canada. 'B e dathan a bhàta geal, dubh, dearg agus òr. 'B e bàta brèagha a bh' innte. Bhiodh iad a' cleachdadh am bàta a' Mhetagama airson a' toirt na saighdearan bho aon dùthaich gu dùthaich eile air sgath 's a' Chiad Chògadh Mhòr. Chaidh i tarsainn a Chuan Siar air ais agus air adhart 151 turas. Thog i suas trì ceud luchd siubhail bho Leòdhas, 'be dìreach fichead boireannaich a bha am measg an dhà ceud agus ochdad fireanach eile. 'B e dìreach daoine òige a bh' ann. Bha a' mhòr chuid a' dol na obair air tuathanasan ann an Canada. Bha iad a' sireadh beathan ùr'.

'B e latha mòr brònach a bh' ann ann an Steòrnabhagh nuair a dh'fhàg Am Metagama. Bha daoine bho air feadh an eilean air a' thighinn ri faicinn a' h-uile daoine a bha a' fàgail. Cuideachd, bha iad a' dol ri ràdh tioraidh gu na daoine a bha a' fàgail. Air Disthairne an fichead sa h-aonamh latha den an Ghiblean ann an naoi deug fichead sa trì dh' fhag am Metagama cidhe Steòrnabhagh. Bha am baile air ghaoil leis an t-uamhas daoine aig ràdh tioraidh gu na teaghlachan aca a bha a' dol a siubhal. Nuair a bha iad aig a chidhe bha iad a' seinn sailm Gàidhlig. Bha flùraichean bòidheach, brèagha air a' thòirt air bòrd a' bhàta. Bha na flùraichean bho Gharraidhean a' Chaisteal bhon a' Mhorair Leverhulme leis an robh Leòdhas aig an àm. Air sgath 's gun robh a bhàta Am Metagama cho mhòr, chan fhaodadh e a' dol a-steach chun a' chidhe. Mar sin dh' fheumadh am Metagama a cuir bataichean beaga a mach ri thogail na trì ceud luchd-siubhal bhon a chidhe a bha a' dol gu Canada. Ged a bha trì ceud daoine bho Leòdhas a' dol air a bhàta bha tòrr daoine eile a bha air a' dol air bòrd ann an Glaschu mar tha. Bha fios aca gur docha nach robh iad dol a dh' faicinn na teaghlachan aca gu bràth tuilleadh. Bha seirbhis aca air bòrd mus do dh' fhag iad Leòdhas. Mus do dh' fhalbh iad dh' fheumadh iad deuchainn medigeach. Fhuair iad Biobuill Ghàidhlig bho Chomun Gàidhleach a Mnathan Uasal.

Air an turas cha robh duine nan aonair air a' bhàta. Bha iad air mìle eile a thogail ann an Glaschu, an toiseachd. A' reir a Pheople's Journal bha iad air a chuir naidheachd

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▲ Mrs Macdonald helping with drama skills for the performance

anns a phàipear mu a' Mhetagama. Bha an naidheachd ag ràdh gun robh a' bhàta a coimhead cofhurtail, le biadh na b' fhearr na bhiodh aca aig an taigh. Bha na daoine à Leòdhas a' smaoinichadh gun robh bàta spaideil agus bha rùmanan mòra ann. Bha iad a' smaoinichadh gun robh am bàta nas fheàrr na, na taighean dubha aca. Ach bha e annasach airson na Leòdhasaich a' faicinn feadhainn as a' Phòlainn aig ithe sgadan àmh. 'B e aon deug latha a bha iad aig muir. Bhiodh na cianalas air a' h-uile duine a' dh' fhad na dachaighean airson na beathan ùr aca ann an Canada. Bha dùil aca gur ann a Mhontreal a' sheòladh iad ach air sgath 's an deigh thàinig orra a' dhol air tìr an Culadh St John ann an New Brunswick. Nuair a dh' fhad iad Steòrnabhagh chaidh iad timicheall Nis an toiseachd. Ach an-diugh bheireadh e seachd uairean a thìde eadar Glaschu agus Toronto. Cuimhnich nach robh siubhal pleana fiughs air toiseachadh aig an àm. Bhàid ad a smaoinichadh gu robh an t-slighe dìreach a' dol a thoirt seachd latha, ach air sgath 's deigh, thug e aon deug latha. Air sgath 's gun robh an deigh ann, air an oidhche bha an bata a stad agus nuair a thàinig latha bhàid ad a' cumail a' dol. Turas fada, dòchas mòr agus beatha ùr. Bhiodh iad a' cur seachd an ùine a cur eòlas air a' cheile, ceilidhean le òrain agus ceòl agus luthchleasan. Cuideachd bhiodh cruinnicheadh spioradail aca.

Thòisich iad beatha ùr ann an Canada. Nuair a ràinaig iad Canada, thòisich iad a' dol gu diofar àitichean ri deànamh obair air tuathanasan. Bha iad a' dol ri obair air tuathanasan ri paigheadh air ais an bàta airson na ticeadan aca. Chuir iad telegram eadar Tunga agus Canada gus a dh' fhadadh teaghlaichean a bruidhinn gu an teaghlach aca a bha air na siubhal gu Canada. Anns na laithean sin cha robh tèarr air a' mhòr chuid de rathaidean. 'B e each agus cairt a' chleachd iad, chan e caraichean. Bha an uisge aca a' tighinn bho tobair. Cha robh solas neo dealan ann. Cha robh dòigh aca guthan a' cheile a' cluintinn, cha robh fònaichean laimh ann. Bha an saoghal cho

eadardhealaichte na tha e a-nis.

'S e buill mhòr do Leòdhas nuair a dh' fhalbh na duine òige seo. Air sgaths a Chiad Chogaidh Mhòr roimhe an Metagama a' falbh cidhe Steòrnabhagh. Chaidh còr is mìle agus ceud air a bhasachadh s'a Cheud Cogaidh Mòr eadar naoi deug ceithir deug agus naoi deug ochd deug. Cuideachd nuair a chaidh an Iolaire fomha air an bliadhna ùr naoi deug naoi deug chaidh barrachd daoine air a chall. Chaill iad còr is dhà cheud daoine nuair a chaidh an Iolair fomha. 'B e a chogadh eadar Breatainn agus a' Ghearamailt a bh' ann. Air sgaths gun do thachair seo ceithir gu còig bliadhna robh an do dh' fhad am Metagama bhiodh tòrr daoine brònach. Nuair an do chaidh na saighdearan air a bhasachadh anns a chogadh agus an Iolaire, bhiodh sin a' fagail na teaghlaichean gu math brònach.

*Le Mia, GM7*

## First Metagama Commemoration Event

Sgoil a' Bhac, Tong School and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Department of Education, Skills and Children's Services held the first in a series of events to commemorate 100 years since the *Metagama* sailed from Stornoway on 21 April 1923.



The first event took place at Upper Coll Community Centre on Tuesday 21 March 2023 at 7 pm. Pupils from Sgoil a' Bhac and Tong showcased their acting, singing and musical skills in a memorable evening. Coinneach 'Mòr' MacIver produced the script and also appeared on stage in the role of 'seanchaidh'. As part of the evening, Back and Tong Gaelic choirs performed, as well as local esteemed singers Bell Ann Martin and Iain 'Costello' MacIver. Calum Martin and pupils showcased psalm presenting skills developed during this project. Additional support from Neil Johnstone, fiddle tutor, and James Duncan MacKenzie, piping instructor, also featured on the evening.



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# Abair e!

**Glaaic, amadan, oinnseach, burraidh, goraisg, buamastair!**

Nach tric a chualas na facail sin, an dara cuid mu ar deidhinn fhèin no daoine eile?

Bha iad uile air an cleachdadh airson cuideigin nach robhar a' meas buileach glic. Mar a chanaist ann an gnàthas-cainnte eile, 'Bha gròt a dhìth an tasdain' air na daoine sin no 'Cha robh iad buileach an ceud!'

Cha robh guth aig luchd na Gàidhlig air 'political correctness' no 'woke culture' nuair a bhathas a' cleachdadh a leithid de dh'abairtean gu bitheanta.

Ged a tha na facail sin caran èibhinn an-diugh, bha abairt chumanta eile aca bho chionn fhada bu chòir toirt oirnn smaoineachadh. B'è sin, 'Glaaic a' bhalla-tharsaing'.

An-diugh tha daoine air a bheil an tinneas-tuiteamach, tinneas-intinn no uireasbhaidh chorporra ann an sgoiltean, obraichean agus àiteachan poblach àbhaisteach. Tha beatha an ìre mhath nàdarra aca.

Cha b' ann mar sin a chleachd cùisean a bhith!

Annas na linntean a dh'fhalbh, nuair nach robhas a' tuigsinn dè bha ag adhbhrachadh a leithid de thinneas, bha nàire air na daoine a bhuineadh dhaibh agus bhithist gam falach bhon mhòr-shluagh. Nuair a thigeadh muinntir a' bhaile a' ceilidh, bhiodh na daoine nach robh buileach coileanta air an cumail air cùl a' bhalla-tharsainn no am 'partition,' eadar an rùm anns an robh an teine san còrr den taigh. Sin far às an tàinig an abairt 'Glaaic a' bhalla-tharsaing.'

Tha sgeulachd ann mu thè òg a thug balach spaideil, aig nach robh Gàidhlig, dhachaigh airson a' chiad uair. Chaidh bràthair dhi, nach robh buileach glic, 's aig nach robh mòran Beurla fhad's a b' aithne dhan teaghlach, a chur gu cùl an talain le pios no dhà agus cupa teatha. Fhuair e rabhadh e bhith sàmhach 's gun nochdadh fhad's a bhiodh bràmair a pheathar a-staigh, air a bheatha bhuan.

Thàinig am bràmair 's shuidh a h-uile duine mu bhòrd a' chidsin. Bha h-uile càil a b' fheàrr na chèile air am beulaibh. An ceann greis, chual' iad guth bho chùl an talain ag èigheach, 'Another piece or I'll appear!'

Mar a bhiodh iad ag ràdha uaireigin, 'S mairg nach beathaich a thruaghan!' Cha robh am balach cho gòrach 's a bha iad an dùil!



## Crofting Corner

*By Isobel Ann Macdonald*

Well...the rhododendron munchers survived to tell the tale. I think that one of them is potentially no longer in lamb, but we will soon find out if she aborted or not.

Onto lambing. It kicked off five days earlier than expected this year. I popped over to our barn to set up the 'lamb cam' and found a ewe with a lamb. She had been scanned for twins, but wasn't showing any signs of lambing the second one. I went to get a pen set up for her and stumbled across a 'mummified' lamb. The live lamb was very small, weighing

just 2.9 kg, but it was perfectly formed. She needed a bit of assistance for the first 12 hours to get the hang of feeding, and then she was off! She hasn't looked back since.

There was a hiatus for a few days and then two ewes decided to lamb at the same time. One had no water bag, but was not progressing, despite pushing hard. The other one had put out her water bags, but was not acting like she was in labour at all, and wasn't pushing. After getting them both penned, I tackled the one that was pushing first. The lamb was quite big and the ewe had a narrow pelvis, so the lamb was stuck by the shoulders and not engaging properly with the birth canal. With a lot of lubricant and a bit of shoogling, the lamb was born safely. In the next pen, the other ewe also had a bit of a narrow pelvis and I could only feel the tip of a hoof. Again, it took a bit of work to open things up, and then I was able to get

one hoof and a head. I couldn't for the life of me manage to get the second leg on my own while trying to hold the sheep steady. Thankfully, my brother timed a visit perfectly and he was able to free the second leg and deliver the lamb. There was another surprise though... the ewe had been scanned for one lamb, but there was a second lamb coming...in the exact same position (i.e. only one leg coming), but we got it out. Big thanks to my brother, who is always willing to help me out with lambing.

At the time of writing, we have had four ewe lambs and a stillborn tup lamb, which is a pretty decent start despite the issues we've faced so far.

Unfortunately, the ewe with the twins developed milk fever again. She had the same problem last year, and the treatment for it is calcium injections. We hope she'll improve quickly like she did in 2022.

If my dates are correct, we will have a few days' reprieve before another five are due on the same day! That could be interesting...the remainder should then be fairly spread out.

Next time, we'll round up our lambing season for you.



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# New Development Officer

The new development officer for Back and Tong has now been in place for three months and is keen to empower local community members to create positive choices in their local area.

Iain Maciver is jointly employed by Back Community Council and the Tong Recreation Association in a role designed to develop a greater sense of community. He is no stranger to the task at hand, having had a similar role in Harris, where he was employed by the West Harris Trust as a Community Participation Officer.

From Tolsta, Iain (mac has been in place in his new role since December, and you will start seeing him in and around the community as he starts to create a development plan for the area. He will be liaising with other trusts on the island, to see how they work and looking at what has been successful in other local communities.

Speaking to *LATN*, Iain said 'We want to create sustainability in the area and a strong community voice'. Part of that will begin with using the newly erected polycarbonate tunnels in both areas to the benefit of the local communities, teaching people how to grow things and helping to reduce social isolation. 'We are also developing a new website for the TRA and I hope to see yoga and gardening classes up and running soon'. Already underway are the 'Health Walks', which started in March. Iain is keen to hear community voices, and urges participation in what is being offered, which aim to benefit all.



For more information, contact Iain at any time via email [iain@tongandback.org](mailto:iain@tongandback.org)

## WHAT'S ON?

### CURRY NIGHT TAKEAWAY

8 APRIL, BACK FREE  
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## Get Growing!

Further to the earlier advanced notice of the 'Open to All' LHHP horticultural show here are a couple of growing hints, whether you exhibit at this show, any other show or just eat the produce yourself.

**PEAS:** Set up pea supports on chosen site, either twigs or mesh. For an early start sow two seeds in a small pot and keep in cold frame ready to plant out in March.

In March prepare seed bed by hoeing and raking to produce a nice crumbly surface, then rake to a fine tilth. Make a flat-bottomed trough by hoe or spade about 23cm wide and about 6cm deep. Sow individual seeds about 6cm apart or transplant from your pots. Cover with poly or fleece till established and risk of frost has passed.

**LEEKS:** Sow seeds now in seed trays or modules in poly crub, tunnel or greenhouse. The strongest plants are then pricked off into pots, grown on and hardened off by exposing them to daytime temperatures until planting out in April/May in a well-drained, compost-rich bed. Each plant should be dropped into a dibbled hole and watered in. As the plants grow draw up the soil around them, on more than one occasion, to encourage blanching.

**BEETROOTS:** Prepare the ground now with compost or well-rotted manure and hoe in. Leave till sowing in May. If you sow too early the plants might bolt. If the soil is too acidic, enhance it with shell sand or lime (sparingly). In April prepare the drills about 25 mm deep and 20 cm wide. Water if too dry. In May sow the seeds, after soaking overnight, two seeds with 10 cm spacing. Alternate thinnings will leave your main crop 20 cm apart.

**LETTUCE:** Sow now under cover for planting out April/May. Soak seed compost then allow to drain before sowing. Cover seed trays with light covering of seed compost. Prick out into modules or small pots at true leaf stage. Prepare beds with good garden compost and maybe add fish, blood and bone fertiliser. Plant out when plants hardy enough. Should be ready for eating in 9-10 weeks.

I hope this encourages you to grow your own veggies. More next month.

Ken Kennedy, LHHP

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### Coll Bride-Back Groom

A wedding of interest to Bacachs took place recently when Catherine, elder daughter of Mr and Mrs Malcolm Macdonald, Outend Coll, was married to Ivor, fourth son of Mr and Mrs Donald Morrison, New Street, Back. The marriage was solemnised at Back Free Church, Rev A. Macleod officiating.

The bride, who was given away by her father, looked radiant in a gown of white figured satin. Her long tulle veil was held by a mother-of-pearl heart-shaped headdress, and she carried a bouquet of red carnations and maidenhair fern.

Her matron of honour was Mrs Annie Macleod, sister of the 'groom, who looked charming in pale figured taffeta, with a matching headdress and shoulder veil. Her flowers were pink carnations.

Miss Janet Smith, niece of the 'groom, and Miss Catherine Isabella Maciver, niece of the bride, were the sweet young bridesmaids, and wore similar dresses of pink and blue with muffs to match. The duties of best man were efficiently carried out by Mr John Macdonald, brother of the bride, who travelled home to attend.

As they came out of the church, the bride was presented with a lucky horse shoe by little Donald Murdo Macleod, nephew of the 'groom. Then in bright spring sunshine, and headed by Mr Neil Macleod, the bridal party were piped from the church to Back Village Hall, a short distance away, where the wedding reception was held. A large number of guests sat down to an enjoyable repast, and the customary toasts were drunk.

One hundred telegrams and numerous useful gifts from far and near were received, the telegrams being read by the bride's cousin, Dr D.R. Murray, Back. Music for the dance which followed was provided by Piper Neil Macleod, and accordionist Willie Beaton, Stornoway, and the festivities were greatly enjoyed by the young couple's many friends.



◀ The wedding of Ivor Morrison and Catherine Macdonald

A beaver lamb coat over a blue gaberdine suit with a pale blue hat was the choice of the bride for her going away outfit. The bridegroom, who was at home for six weeks, left last week to rejoin his ship. The good wishes of the community are extended to the couple on the occasion of their marriage.

### Back-Lochs Wedding In Glasgow

Craig's Restaurant, Union Street, Glasgow, was the scene of a pretty wedding on March 4th, when the Rev Alexander Macleod, Crow Road Free Church, officiated at the wedding of Isobel MacRae, only daughter of Mr and Mrs Angus Macaulay, Keose, Lochs.

The bride, dressed in figured corded silk and carrying a bouquet of pink carnations, white lilies, and white hyacinths, was given away by her father, who is home on holiday from the United States.

She was attended by the 'groom's sister Chrissie, who wore a dress of rose-pink corded silk, with a matching head-dress of rose-petal. She carried a bouquet of pale lemon carnations and blue iris.

The bride was presented with a silver horse-shoe by the trainbearer, her cousin Master Norman Maciver. The duties of best-man were ably performed by the bride's brother, Angus. Among those present at the wedding were the bride's parents and brothers, who had travelled from Back and the bride's aunt from Aberdeen.

At the reception numerous congratulatory telegrams, including three cablegrams from the United States were read by the 'groom's brother, Angus. At the end of an enjoyable evening the young couple left for their honeymoon amid the good wishes of a wide circle of friends.

### White Wedding

A Lewis bride was the central figure in a lovely white wedding solemnised by Rev. A Macdonald at the John Knox Free Church, Perth.

She was Jessie Bell MacLennan, youngest daughter of Mr and Mrs MacLennan, 23 Gress, Stornoway, who married Francis William August Haddow, second son of Mr and Mrs F.W.H. Haddow, 21 Strathmore Avenue, Coupar, Angus.

Dressed in a gown of white figured taffeta with full-length veil, the bride carried a white prayer book and was given away by her brother-in-law, Mr A. Desson.

The bridesmaid, Miss Agnes MacLennan, wore a dress of gold essgrain and carried a bouquet of pale lavender tulips. The duties of best man were performed by Mr J. B. MacVean.

The bride was also attended by two little flower-girls, Valerie and Sandra Desson, her nieces. They were dressed in turquoise net over taffeta and carried Victorian posies. A Highland-dressed page-boy, Francis Williams, the 'groom's nephew, completed the picture.

A reception was held afterwards in York House, Perth, where over 50 congratulatory telegrams were read. In addition, the young couple received many useful gifts.

For travelling, the bride chose a pink costume with brown accessories topped by a smart beaver lamb coat.

### Communion Services

At the half-yearly Communion Services in Back, Rev. Mr Macleod, minister of the congregation, was assisted by the Rev. Mr Mackenzie, Leverburgh, and Rev. Mr Macdougall, Hope Street, Glasgow. All services were well attended, and there were quite a number of visitors from other congregations.



Jessie Bell MacLennan and ▲ Francis Haddow

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# Old Photos

Donald MacLennan (*Dòmhnail Sheogaidh*) on the right with his wife Mary (23 Gress).

In the middle is Donald's brother, Alex (24 Gress).



▼ Cathie, *bean Tuxy* (Vatisker)



Stalwarts of Gress. ►

L-R: Butch (Murdo Mackenzie, 25), Left (John Ferguson, 15) and Domnhall Bobshie (Donald Macleod, 31).



▲ *Catriona Darriadh* (Coll) and *Anna Iain Bhig* (Upper Coll)

Two Seumasas and a dog: Meg the collie, James Murray ► (*mac Niall Sheumais a' Ghobha* is *Catriona*) and James Macdonald (*mac Dollan* is *Christine Dhòmhnail Ghoidy*).



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## Coinneach aig Baile

By the time you read this edition of the *LATN*, the *Metagama* will have truly sailed.

The children of our district will know much more than we ever did about the *Metagama* and the issues that led to so many making the decision to leave for a new life on the other side of the Atlantic.

We are anticipating the events in Stornoway around the date it left, 21 April 1923.

We are delighted that four natives of Detroit whose parents sailed on the *Metagama* will be visiting at that time and will see for themselves how we remember their parents' departure 100 years ago.

We hope to have an evening at the Comann Eachdraidh with them and take them to the schools so that the children can hear firsthand about their lives in Detroit.

We are aware that many returned

when the Great Depression meant lost jobs, lost opportunities and lost hope in the New World.

Some were able to stay, however, and realise the promise and the life they had sought when they left our island. Our guests are among the first generation to have benefitted from their parents' decision to leave on the *Metagama*.

It saddens me to think how many people of my generation knew so many who had so much to tell us about these times. We might have heard words like *Metagama*, Tearlach Hunter, 'Lever', Kate Liddle, *Iolaire*, Raids and *An Cogadh*, but they meant little to us, and we didn't ask as we didn't know what we should ask, and we didn't hear the older generation talking about them, in our presence anyway.

Yet here we are 100 years later realising that these people were 'live' carriers of history. They didn't seem to realise it, and we had no idea. They were just our grandparents and our neighbours. They sought no limelight, and we didn't give it to them.

I am glad today's young generation will know what their forefathers did and the reasons why in a way my generation didn't.

Now we realise that we are the 'older' generation and that we have seen more material changes in our short time here than previous generations saw over 1000 years. We have to record what our forefathers did, but we also have to record what have been our life experiences so that future generations know who they are and what our generation saw and did.

That may not be as dramatic as in previous generations but nevertheless we must tell our tale.


I look forward to the new home of the Comann Eachdraidh in the old school playground. I hope it becomes a source of information for the community, and for the people of our area at home or away.

I look forward to having cups of tea as we discuss, research and collate our history as other areas have done. I'm told I will have to bring my own mug and biscuits.

I hope the community gets involved in the exciting plans to have a state-of-the-art centre on the old school site in years to come. That is for the next generation to take forward. I hope they do and maybe the day will come when once again this will be the centre of our community, and that when a grumpy bodach comes in saying he remembers the 'good old days' at the site they will just give him another cup of tea and hope he doesn't say anything else about Quacky, Smiler, Clupshag, Peigi Ceit, Smirag and his old classmates Dennis, Rash, Ween, Queeny, Bouncy, Rip, Cadbury and so on. They all knew the site in other times. That was part of their history. Nicknames—now that is another project.

Today's news is tomorrow's history, and that is why the Comann Eachdraidh and our community paper, *Loch a Tuath News*, are so important.





# CURRY TAKEAWAY NIGHT


TONG HALL

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Sgoil a' Bhac representation



Ava Scaramuccia



Gregor Macphail



Josh Macleod



Lilly Scaramuccia

Another successful Woody's Express Lewis and Harris Cross Country series has come to an end, with lots of junior Blue representation on the podium. Sgoil a' Bhac was the most represented school over the series of three races, with the Back under-11 girls taking home the team shield. Individual girls' under-11 places went to Ava Scaramuccia, who came second overall; her twin sister Lilly took third. Another Sgoil a' Bhac duo of Gregor Macphail and Josh Macleod took second and third place, respectively, in the under-11 boys section. Ryan Weatherston of Tong Primary took third place in the boys' under-9 category.

**Cross Country**

U11 boys Josh Macleod, Finlay Campbell and Gregor Macphail ▼

All photos courtesy Eric Mackinnon.



◀ U11 girls Lilly Scaramuccia, Ava Macphail, Elise Macdonald and Ava Scaramuccia

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