



Kate Kennedy nee Campbell (1883-1959) was born and brought up at No 6 Bohuntin in the house where her nieces Sally and Ishbel still reside(2020). She was the grandmother of the Mackintosh family, Altour Cottage. She became a qualified teacher and a keen Gaelic scholar. She started married life living at the head of Glenroy and in the 1930s the family moved to settle in Achaluachrach. This little talk has been translated from the original Gaelic writing and finds her in later life reflecting on one aspect of what seems to us an idyllic childhood, in the midst of the vibrant native Gaelic speaking community of Brae Lochaber. This was before this little enclave was thrown open to the wider world with the coming of the railway in the 1890s and the momentous changes of the 20th century. While bringing many social and material improvements to the area nothing was done to halt the dispersal of the indigenous people and the virtual eradication of their rich and ancient culture.

## Mun Cuairt a' Chagailte.

"Around the Fireside" by Catherine Kennedy, Achaluachrach, Brae Lochaber 1938

They have many ways to pass the long nights in these sophisticated days of which they had no knowledge of in olden times, but I am not sure they are so happy in their minds as the old people in days gone by. They were remarkably good at the ceilidh in Brae Lochaber and there was a special house in each little village where they would gather to ceilidh each night. Old and young would

congregate, the young would dance to fiddle music, mouth music, or canntaireachd, sing songs, and very often play draughts in one end of the house. They wouldn't find the time long in going past.

Around the fireside at the other end of the house the old men would be in a group together and they would have the nights to themselves! There is a very clear picture in my mind yet of the special little townships that I knew.

In the evening twilight when the animals were put in order, the kindling and the morning fire had been found, clean water from the well taken inside at the end of that night, the clatter of feet was heard, hurrying to the Ceilidh house.

At the beginning usually would be Aonghas Bàn Iain 'ic Sheumais. He was one of the Mackintoshes of the Braes. His father, a young man at the time, was with the army of Sir John Moore at Corunna. Angus was a very precise, sharp tongued man, he would be crooning songs to himself as he was growing into an old man.

He had many stories and he was very keen on tales of the Fianna. There was not a stone nor a cairn that he did not have the history of, from the bottom of Glen Roy to the the top. He would speak so



**Aonghas Bàn Mac-an-Tòisich**  
**a regular seanachie at the ceilidh.**

extensively and he would tease out a story so long, although we would not grow tired at all of hearing about the battle that was between the MacDonalds and the Mackintoshes on Mulroy. What a hurry was on the fugitive who fled from that bloody field, the pursuit after him, the streams of blood running from the strife and conflict and the blood reddening the moor before he leapt across the Roy at “Leum an t-Saighdeir”

*“Theich 's gun do theich Clann Tòisich, 'S gun do theich, Theich 's gun do theich , 'S gun do theich na bha beò dhuibh, Dh'fhalbh Clann Mhuirich, Ach dh'fhuirich Clann Dòmhnail.”*

*“They fled, they fled, Clan Mackintosh, They, fled, those of you that were alive. Clan MacPherson fled and Clan Donald remained.”*

says the old song: seemingly they didn't need to make much of a stay, as it is the Mackintosh that has this part of Brae Lochaber to-day. Much water has gone down the Roy since that great day.

Many times he told us about the “Bantighearna Bheag” the little wife that the Keppoch chief took from Ireland to Lochaber. She went away mysteriously and quietly, but her spirit remained around the wood where she would love to walk. In the gloaming, said Angus, she is seen yet at Lag na Torrain Bhuidhe. It's a lovely green knoll and no doubt she chose it from putting her in mind of the beautiful country where she was raised. She took with her as a dowry to Lochaber Burkes and Boyles, and that kind are still there today.



***Torran na Ceap the site of the old seat of the Keppoch Chiefs where the Bantighearna Bheag lived.***

Do we not still have a fear going past Sròn Dubh an t-Sithein at night-fall : here, said Angus Bàn was the dwelling place of the fairies of old. In the summer dusk if we sit and if we let our minds fly to the realm of dreams would we not see yet in the twilight, the little people playing and dancing amongst the foxgloves ( that's the plant of the fairy) on Lon na Chaochain Rògaich (a small narrow flowing mountain stream), whispering in the reedy places, skipping, crisply, merrily among the bog myrtle and alder, and the broken willows frolicking with them: old River Roy of many a story crooning happily, running under her hazel and rowan banks keeping tune with them, and helped by a gentle evening breeze, fragrant with heather honey, shaking the leaves and the ferns.



***Sròn Dubh an t-Sithein where the fairies of old were to be found.***

Angus would tell us how a long time ago they would go from Lochaber to Loch Hourn with carts to fetch herring. This was a long expedition and they would be days on the road, they were in no hurry and many's the good dram the old boys drank to keep warm and to keep the spirits up.

After Angus would come Gileasba Aonghais 'ic Ghileasbuig, a man never came to a house more decent or of more elegant manner than him. He was the friend of the children in the village. Didn't he know where the sharp eyed squirrel hides its nuts for the winter and where each little bird had her nest. He would tell us when he would hear the first curlew ascending Glen Roy, she would fly high with a merry whistle to give the joyful message of spring to the wild deserted world of Brae Roy.

He knew the old ash tree where the great eyed owl would make her home. He would say so humorously, "Is she not related to the ancient one of Dòmhnall MacFhionnlaigh nan Dàn."

And perhaps he was right when he would look out for the blue grey billed heron climbing the river. He would say that it was to go from a dark to a bright time, but when she would descend the river, flying quickly as if she was agitated before the storm, he would say that a bad time was waiting for us and he would usually be right. Then he would see the Northern Lights blazing and making a sea of fire of the sky in the far north, he would say I don't care for them, usually there comes a black deluge after those riders.

Many times he would show us by the faint firelight, foxes moving so uncertainly in the dark from the bottom of Croit a' Ghreusaiche to lose themselves in the seillsideirs of Glac a'Chlamhain. He would say "The fairies are lighting their candles and it's time for the children of the village to be sleeping."

When the first curl of bracken would come above the ground, he would say to us that the first salmon would come up the Roy. There would not be a proper night unless Gileasba was at the Ceilidh. He would have a sharp little stick usually of hazel and he would pass the time carving with a knife until he had a pile of shavings in front of him. Many times he made a whirly-gig for us. That was our childhood. The woman of the house would not be averse to Gileasba's shavings at all. A smile would come on her when he looked to the road at the time of going home. The shavings would come in useful to her for the first fire in the morning. Afterwards with little short steps as he would have on a city pavement, would come James Boyle the tailor, one of the Boyles of Lochaber. He spent almost twenty years away from Lochaber. He learned a trade in England and from that went abroad to New Zealand. A little bit of an English accent had come on his Gaelic. He had many stories to tell of things he saw abroad and many tales he told us but he would forever want to be recounting the old deeds he did after deer and taking salmon from the Roy. Throughout the years he was away although he saw many beautiful places, the parallel roads of Glen Roy would never go from his memory.



***The last  
ceildh  
house in  
Bohuintin  
Mòr.  
Angus  
Kennedy  
lived there,  
and this  
photo was  
taken in  
the 1950s.  
Only a little  
rubble  
remains to-  
day.***



***Earlier picture of Angus Kennedy's house viewed from the south. (His mother was said to be related to Dòmhnall Donn)***

In the middle would be the fear-an-taighe, this kindly old man. He was well educated. He was full of poetry, making and singing songs and he had the sweetest melodious voice, although the years were weighing on him and rheumatism getting him down. I often heard him give us songs of Duncan Ban, of MacKinnon, MacLachlan, MacMaster Alasdair, and many others. He was very fond of MacKinnon's An Dubh Ghleannach and Dòmhnall MacFhionnlaigh's A'Chomhachag. He had a particularly good memory. How he would draw the words out and he would give us Latha Chùilodair by Iain Ruadh Stiùbhart .

*"Bha Lasair-teine nan Gall*

*A 'frasadh pheileir m'ur cheann*

*Mhill sud eireachdas lann 's bu mheud e"*

*"The fire of the foreigners*

*Raining bullets about our heads*

*Spoilt the swordsmanship, great is the pity."*

A band of heroes from Lochaber went away on that dangerous course. He would tell us where Eòghan Ruadh Mackintosh, Red Hugh of Culloden, who was an officer in the Prince's army is at rest under the doorway of the ancient little church that was built by Ailean nan Creach in olden times in Cille Choirrill.

Nothing would make him so angry as to be hearing someone praising Iain Lom, the Keppoch bard. He was a Campbell and had an un-measured loathing for the sharp-tongued bard who abused his

clan so much. He had great stories of plunder, of sheilings and ancient deeds that happened in Lochaber since time immemorial. He would show us in the bottom of Allt na Ceardach where the last creach that came into Glenroy from Badenoch had stopped. He had a great respect for Dòmhnall Donn mac Fear Both-Thionndain. The house of Dòmhnall Donn can be seen yet at Tom an Taigh Mhòir (The mound of the big house) a bare knoll above the Roy. Many's the creach the good Donald took in his day. We cannot but have a side to the brown-haired hero although he was continually breaking the law.

The world did not trouble the warrior much because he had the nature of the bard at heart, he would go from joy to sadness as innocent children will.

*"Thogainn creach air Tighearna Ghrannid is dh'òlainn dràm 'san dol seachad"*

*"I would take a creach from the Laird of Grant and I would drink a dram in going past"* he said, and he was strong and brave taking the creachs as were all the hardy highland caterans at that time, and when Cupid's arrow hit him he composed a little song to Mairead `Og or the Brown Maiden who was in Caithness, and at last his heart broken, in the middle of enemies and execution awaiting him from killing his sweetheart, he sighed so miserably and forlornly,

*'Ochòin a Dhia cum rium mo chiall*

*Cha robh mi riamh cho cunnartach*

*Bithidh mi màireach air cnoc gun cheann*

*'S cha bhith mo chàirdean furachail'*

*'Alas o God keep me sane*

*I was never so in danger*

*I will be tomorrow on a knoll without a head*

*My friends will not be in attendance'*

He had a conflict against all in his nature and he could not believe that the evil had won.

Gileasba Aonghais 'ic Ghileasbuig, as I had already gathered, was one of Dòmhnall's kin, "Sliochd an Taighe" as we called them and although there was not much of Dòmhnall Donn's nature in Gileasba, His eyes would light up and he would make smaller and smaller hazel shavings when he heard mention of him.



***Clach Sgoilte on  
the hillside above  
Bohuntin***

***Dòmhnall Donn  
was said to be  
the same height  
as the stone***

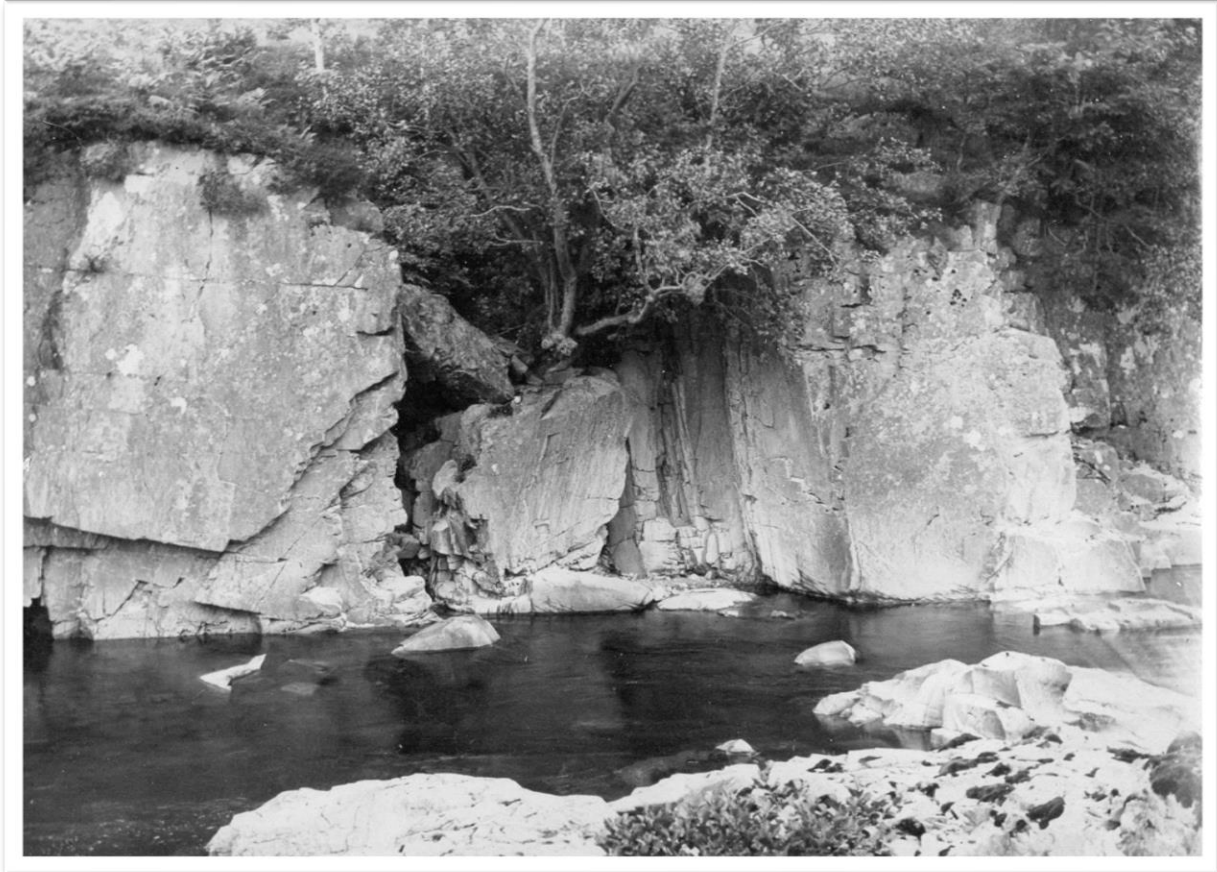
There was another hero about whom the fear-an-taighe had many stories and that was Iain Odhar.

The ruin of the type of house he had is seen yet on a beautiful plot of land called the Briagach. Although Iain was a Campbell, he lived among the MacDonalds and he needed to be cunning in his manner though usually himself and Keppoch would be on good terms. He was brave and strong at the time of the Keppoch Murder because the murderers wanted him to help them; "I will not, I will not," said Iain. If I put my hand in your blood today, you will put your hands in my blood to-morrow."

It was he himself who killed the last wolf that was in Lochaber. He saw it at Achavaddy he followed the trail through Colaraig and he put an arrow in it and displayed it on Lòn a' Bhoicinn in upper Inverroy.

Below the Briagach the Roy has great rattling and roaring. If you go a little from the road you will see that it is from a hole known as Leab' Iain Idhir (Iain Odhar's bed) that the noise comes. The worthy Iain made much noise and uproar on this world himself, and it is as though the river keeps as a

memory the place where the cateran hid when there was a pursuit after him, as was usual.



*Leap' Iain Idhir photographed in the 1920's. It has since collapsed into the river.*

There is not the opportunity in this short time to relate all the things we had at the old ceilidhs in Lochaber. There was no fear of feeling the winter long listening to the likes of this.

It did not matter to us the whistle of the stinging east wind of Meallan Odhar, and although the "Fiddlers of Strathdearn" (as the old fear-an-taighe would say) were outside going crazy, we would be happy and joyful around the fireside















