

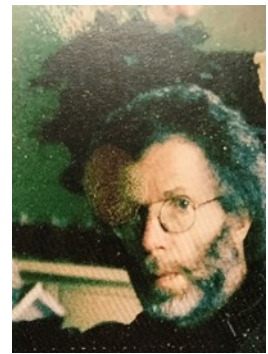
The GalGael Trust

Report of the 7th Trip to Iona, 2024

Seventh Sojourn

Last year's [report](#) of the GalGael trip to Iona was an extremely long one! I had thought it was going to be our last as John MacLean is selling the Green Shed, formerly Iona Hostel, an so I wrote something that would pull together threads from previous years. However, the sale has not yet been completed, and John very kindly offered to let us come back for a further year, and again, at the generous rates that were within capacity to fundraise without conflicting with GalGael's other work.

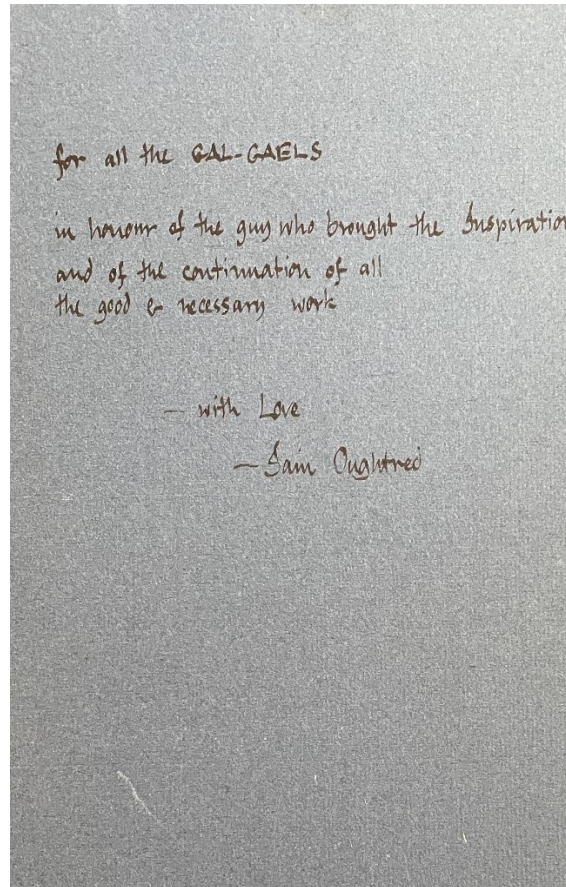
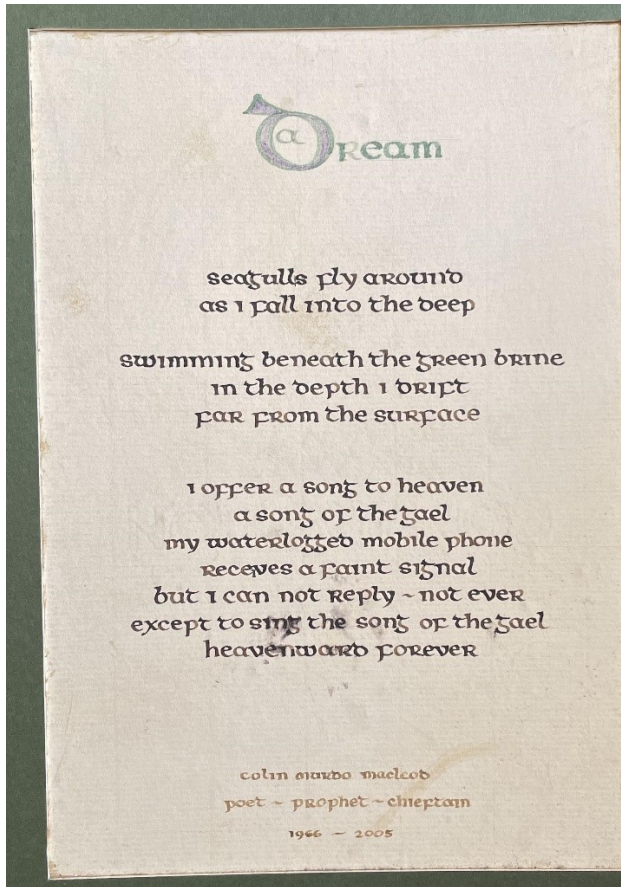
This year's trip was therefore the 7th and probably final sojourn in the original form, though it is possible that we may in future be able to do something with the Iona Community. John is hopeful that his laying down of the hostel that he created and has so beautifully carried all these years will be completed soon. I have been slow to produce this report as I returned from Iona only to be immersed in another Quaker related activity – organising an online Memorial Gathering for our late friend the Quaker wooden boatbuilder, Iain Oughtred. Iain was an artist in wood, water, wind and music. A small group of GalGael were present for his online memorial, and the resulting testimony to his life is at - <https://bit.ly/oughtred-testimony> - I mention it also because our funding for the Iona trips have had such strong support from Quaker sources. It is Iain's model birlinn (or Hebridean longship) that stands in the GalGael reception area, having been commissioned by Colin Macleod early on in our journey. An image of some of Iain's calligraphy, reproducing a poem that Colin wrote before his own passing, is shown on the next page. This report is a good place to share it.



Iain Oughtred, 1939-2024



Most of the group ready for departure from the GalGael in Govan for this year's trip, Friday 18 – Monday 22 March 2024



Calligraphy by the late Quaker boatbuilder, Iain Haig Oughtred, of Colin Macleod's last poem, "for all the GalGael's"

What We Did on Iona

The pattern of our Iona trip was similar to previous years. This year we had 14 places, but one was unwell at the last minute. We comprised a mixture of GalGael trainees, volunteers, staff and board. We hired a minibus and headed up to Iona on Friday 15 March and came back the following Monday. The weekend comprised the usual mixture of preparing and sharing food, discussions, a visit to the Abbey and its museum, and walks to St Columba's Bay, the Hermit's Cell and up Dun I, to the Well of Eternal Youth, with all due splashing. People were very excited about going, and in a pre-meeting Danny told everyone how he'd had a dream some weeks earlier about going to an island on a boat, and he never believed that it would come true. This year, we were made up of 6 men and 7 women. We had a lovely interaction with the Iona Community, with 9 of our number choosing to attend their service in the Abbey on the Sunday, eight of them joined us for dinner, and they invited all of us to lunch with the Community on the Monday before we left.



Our minibus navigating the Iona ferry



Iona Abbey from John Smith's grave



"Connecting Coastal Communities" is a GalGael motto: an Iain Oughtred designed Saint Ayles Skiff at Iona Pier



GalGael commune with the Sheila-na-gig at the Nunnery



Saint Columba's wee nook and cranny, Iona Abbey

What we Explored Together

Every year the purpose of the trip has a general purpose, which is to explore very generally what spirituality may or may not mean to us. But how does a group get into such a question? One way, is to tie it in with issues that arise in our everyday work at GalGael. This is helpful because it strengthens the reflection that we bring back to Govan into the workshop. The training programme and other activity in the workshop and on the water are not just activities for their own sake. They are also about helping one another to deepen into community. Community can be understood as having three aspects – soil, soul and society. That is our relationship with the natural environment, with the inner life of the mind or soul (or whatever term you might be comfortable with) and with each other. Often, that means wrestling with our inner and outer “demons”, the things that can trip us up from functioning well in a community and as a community of members together. One way of approaching that, is by looking at how to process anger.

There is a fictional story in the novels of Carlos Castaneda. Castaneda’s character Don Juan is a “sorcerer” or a kind of medicine man who has grown wise over the years, but he didn’t start out like that. He tells that he was once a very angry young man. He was angry with everyone and everything, and it had become a problem for the community.



What did the community do? The village elder told Don Juan that they were going to throw a huge party to celebrate who he was. All the neighbouring tribes would be invited. There would be much drumming, dancing and feasting, and many ceremonies. At the high point of the ceremonies the elder led Don Juan down to the Great River, which was in a raging torrent after heavy rain. He commanded Don Juan, “Kneel down, and pray that the river will be your teacher.”

Don Juan did as was suggested. After some time, the elder said, “Now, stand up Don Juan!” Don Juan started to straighten himself, but before he had fully got up the elder gave him one almighty push from behind, and as he tumbled down into the swirling current shouted after him, “Don Juan – don’t be angry with the river!”

Castaneda writes:

“The current dragged him for a long distance. And while he was being dragged and trying his best not to succumb, he entered into a strange frame of mind. He knew his flaw. He was a very angry man and his pent-up anger made him hate and fight with everyone around. *But he could not hate or fight the river*, or be impatient with it, or fret, which were the ways he normally behaved with everything and everybody in his life. All he could do with the river was follow its flow.”

But this was more than just being carried along by the river. This was a lesson in what Don Juan called *impeccability*, meaning to learn to come into a relationship with our environment that can allow us to survive and even thrive. If you're in the raging river of life, you have to learn the difference between battling what you cannot change, and using its currents to help you along, like a martial artist will use the force of an opponent's blow. You have to become aware of your poise in life, and so be better equipped to “navigate life” as we called our first ever GalGael training programme. There is a passage about such *impeccability* in Matthew's gospel “Be perfect, therefore...” (5:48). It sounds like a wacko demand, until you realise that “perfect” is a poor translation of the original Greek word, *teleios*, which means “completed”, “fulfilled” or “whole in all your parts”. That was what Don Juan learned from the river: to become more and more whole in his life, in all his parts. As one commentary on the story has put it, you “shift attention from fighting reality to focussing on dealing with reality” and that way, you use your life's energy more effectively.

A Few of Folks' Responses

- The strategy that you use to get through life is different from every individual, but when you come into GalGael you know that you are going to be accepted.
- In GalGael we share an intention – the intention is to make GalGael work – and that is an experience of love.
- I am so overwhelmed by Iona, I'm so happy that I came, so beautiful.
- I never realised that the Book of Kells was done here, and that it shows the plants that are found here. I now want to go and see it in Dublin.
- Yesterday was a spectacular day. For me, going up Dun I was the best bit. It was like going to a pagan church in nature – the well and then the Hermit Cell where we found the hawk's feather.
- It was so peaceful and joyful at the well, very stress-free.
- I loved to see the layers of age, the connection with the saints of the past, and that we were walking in the same steps that they had walked.
- The Abbey was very beautiful, a reminder that work is a prayer. And on the walks, the variety of plants, the fungi growing in the grass, and the juniper berries.
- It's not the possessing that's important, it's the making. The sword has failed, the day of the sword is over. Our lives can no longer be about sharpening our weapons, but sharpening our chisels.
- Work is your prayer. To do the work is to do your prayer, like Hail Mary when running.
- I had not cried for thirty years, but here on Iona an angel flew down, and I've kept on crying.

- It was great to have all the visitors from the Abbey – I was overwhelmed – but good to have all the commentary. Feeding them all was loaves and fishes, but there’s always enough. I wonder if that’s a more real version of communion? It happened.
- I feel more centred now. The whole weekend was amazing, and the stars at night. I’ve shed tears and laughed. It was overwhelming.
- Thank you to the funders.

Funding and Thanks

Our budget was for approximately £2,894. The main sources were £1,826 from a Quaker source, the John Wigham (Enjoyment) Trust, intended for people to enjoy themselves. A further £828 represented 50% of a donation of £1,656 from the Institute of Engineers in Scotland from their fundraising dinner at which Loki (nephew of GalGael’s Tam McGarvey) had been the speaker and directed our way. The balance was made up by participant donations and an expected collection at the Glasgow Quakers, scheduled for July. It was loaves and fishes, but we had just enough: and as one of our participants said, “thank you to the funders.”



“Loaves and fishes” – *The Last Supper* – (Eat your heart out, Leonardo da Vinci!)





Pagan goes on at the Well of Eternal Youth, and the empty circle Zen of the Hermit's Cell