

Recollections of a Royal Visit to Tarbert, 1956

From the Comunn Eachdraidh Scalpaigh Archives.

The following is a translation of an article that appeared in the History of Scalpay School Magazine, 2012. It was written and translated by Finlay MacSween, 30 Scalpay, who was 5 years' old at the time of the visit to Tarbert by Queen Elizabeth II in 1956.

“Sometimes, visitors called in to see us and that was a very special day for us. The most famous visitor in my time I believe was Queen Elizabeth.

Every one of us went up on fishing boats to Tarbert to see her, with new flags, which Miss Weir placed in our hands, to wave above our heads when the Queen came into view.

Although the Queen's visit was historic, I think we gained greater pleasure from looking at the Britannia anchored in East Loch Tarbert, her black and white and red colours shining in the sun.

It was a historic day for me in another sense in that, on the very same day, I got lost in the crowd. I can still remember Rachel running towards me and, holding me tightly at the crossroads opposite Duncan MacAskill's shop, asking me out of breath, where was I headed for? I was lost and wasn't even aware of it. She led me by the hand to my mother who was frantically searching for me at the pier. When she saw I was safe, she gave her and the friend who was with her sixpence each, though I didn't get a penny!

For a long time, Iain Dhaidh from Croft 28 teased me about it, claiming I was simply making my way to the Hotel, for a celebratory glass.”

You can read the original Gaelic text of Finlay's article at the Platinum Jubilee Exhibition which is being held at the Scalpay Community Centre on Saturday, 4 June, from 11.00 am to 1.30 pm and Monday, 6 June, 11.00 am to 4.00 pm. The exhibition tells the story of our connections with royalty which extend from the visit to Scalpay in 1746 by the fugitive Prince Charles Edward Stuart to more recent visits by Prince Charles, Duke of Rothesay, to Scalpay and Harris. We look forward to seeing you in Scalpay.

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