# Dugald Sinclair

## The Life and Work of a Highland Itinerant Missionary

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> *Saturday, 9th June 1810*—I was, last night, solemnly set apart for the work of the Lord, as an Itinerant, by prayer, in Brother Barclay's meeting-house at Kilwinning. Messrs Anderson, Barclay and McFarlane were present, and engaged in the service. The season was peculiarly solemn and interesting to me indeed. The difficulties, the dangers, the arduousness, and the blessedness of the work before me, moved and overpowered my soul (Sinclair 1810: 7).

These words, penned by Dugald Sinclair, form the earliest surviving description of the 'setting apart' of a Gaelic-speaking itinerant missionary of dissenting persuasion for work in the Scottish Highlands. Dissenting itinerant missionaries had been active in the Highlands from the end of the eighteenth century, but the records of their activities are relatively sparse in most cases, and seldom contain sufficient detail to allow the full reconstruction of their individual biographies (Meek 1987). For Dugald Sinclair, however, we possess an unusual wealth of documentation, the centre-piece being a complete set of journals written by Sinclair himself during the years 1810-15 and published in Edinburgh by Christopher Anderson, the organiser of the Scotch Itinerant Society, which sustained Sinclair's labours in this period (Sinclair 1810-15). These journals provide meticulous accounts of the writer's preaching tours, mainly in the Inner Hebrides, the Clyde islands and mainland Argyll, and they are of great value in illuminating the progress of dissenting evangelicalism in the West Highlands and the islands in the early nineteenth century.

In 1815 Sinclair became the pastor of Lochgilphead Baptist Church, and sixteen years later he emigrated to Ontario, Canada, where he continued his preaching activity. We possess substantial evidence regarding the reasons for his emigration, his subsequent religious affiliations and his influence in his new environment. All this sheds much light on the development of church polity and religious thought among Highland Baptists and emigrants of Baptist persuasion. The record of Sinclair's life is, indeed, so full that we know not only the date of his 'setting apart' in Kilwinning, but also the date of his last preaching engagement in Ontario, which took place at the Lobo (Poplar Hill) meeting-house of the Disciples of Christ on 2 October 1870. Sixteen days later, he passed to his rest, having spent nearly seventy years in the Christian ministry, and having divided his time almost equally between the Scottish Highlands and Canada (Sheppard 1870). Sinclair thus enjoyed a long, eventful life which brings together two major movements in nineteenth-

century Highland society, namely evangelicalism and emigration, and his activities graphically illustrate significant aspects of both processes.

## The Early Years

Sinclair's life-story lacks detail only at its beginning. There is no surviving official record which preserves the date or place of his birth, or the names of his parents. Canadian sources give his date of birth as 25 May 1777 (Butchart 1949: 139). His own journals have little to say about his activities before 1810, but they do demonstrate that after that date he had close links with Ballimore, perhaps to be equated with Ballimore beside Kilmichael Glassary, and that he usually lodged at Glasvar, to the south-east of Ford (Sinclair 1810: 9, 26; 1811: 7; 1812: 33; 1813: 23; 1814: 1, 28; 1815: 8). Canadian sources further indicate that Sinclair had a brother, Donald, who had reached Mosa Township, Middlesex County, Ontario, by 1830 (McColl 1979: 24), and who died on 3 March 1868, aged eighty-two years and nine months (Males 1985). The register of baptisms for the parish of Glassary (Glassary OPR) records the birth of a son, Donald, on 3 August 1785 to John Sinclair and Christian McKellar, then resident at Ballimore, but later (by 1789) living at the Mill, Uila, a place nowadays known as Uillian, to the south-east of Kilmichael Glassary. As the dates of birth of the two individuals correspond to within two months, it is a distinct possibility that we have thus discovered the official record of the birth of Sinclair's brother and the names of his parents. (See Appendix.)

The Glassary parish register shows, however, that several Sinclair families resided at Ballimore, Uila and Glasvar in this period, and the evidence suggests that they may have been closely related in certain instances. Given Sinclair's preference for Glasvar as his 'lodging', he may have belonged to a Sinclair family in Glasvar whose children were not presented for baptism at the parish church, and are therefore not recorded in the Glassary register. On the other hand, Ballimore figures relatively prominently in Sinclair's journals, and he indicates that he had 'relations' there (Sinclair 1814: 28). His journals also give the impression that ties of kith and kin were of some importance to him, and it is interesting that he appears to have married within the kindred. His wife, Christina, whom he married in 1825, was the daughter of Malcolm and Mary Sinclair, whose place of residence was in the Oban district. Christina was born on 3 May 1803, and died on 9 August 1888 (Campbell 1917: 40; Kilgour 1888).

At the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, Mid Argyll supported a vigorous Gaelic-speaking population, many of whom were engaged in work on the land, whether as farmers, small tenants or labourers. Some were employed as weavers, tailors and shoemakers, and there were a number of fishermen, one of whom was a certain Donald Sinclair, resident in Ballimore. Another man of the same name, resident in Glasvar, was a labourer (Military List 1803). One of these men may have been Dugald Sinclair's brother, Donald, whom we have already mentioned. There is no evidence to

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1777-1870

indicate what occupation was pursued by Dugald Sinclair himself before 1801, but he may have travelled beyond Mid Argyll in search of employment. An entry in his journal for 1810, written in the neighbourhood of Caolside, near Clachan, Kintyre, refers to his living there before his experience of evangelical conversion:

> Find very little comfort in this quarter, saving a few moments of retirement that I have, to call to my recollection the abundant riches of the grace of Jesus, that delivered me from the thralldom under which I groaned when I resided here (Sinclair 1810: 8).

It is not clear how long Sinclair 'resided' in this area, or whether his conversion actually occurred there. It is, however, known that in the late eighteenth century Kintyre and Knapdale were being affected by deep spiritual movements. Missionaries of the Relief Church were active in these parts from 1797, and in 1800 Arran and Kintyre were visited by the Congregational preachers, James Haldane and John Campbell. Haldane and his brother, Robert, made a major contribution to the growth of dissenting evangelicalism in Scotland in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, particularly through the founding of the influential Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home in 1797. James Haldane's evangelical preaching drew crowds and caused no small commotion throughout Kintyre; indeed, Haldane and Campbell were apprehended at Whitehouse, but, to the consternation of their opponents, they returned to the area and continued to preach immediately after their release by the Sheriff of Argyll. By 1801 the Haldanes' Society was supporting a full-time itinerant missionary in Kintyre, and Congregational churches had begun to emerge in the area by 1802 (Meek 1987). It is highly likely that the beginning of Dugald Sinclair's religious interest is to be traced back to this period.

Whatever the circumstances of his spiritual awakening, Sinclair had become an evangelical believer by 1801, and he had embraced Baptist principles by March of that year, when he was baptised by immersion. His baptism took place in Glasgow, and was conducted by James Lister, who became the pastor of the first 'English' Baptist church in the city, which was constituted in November 1801 (Sheppard 1870; Yuille 1926: 60). We do not know why Sinclair had made his way to Glasgow, but, like many other Highlanders of this period, he may have gone south to find work. At this point he probably heard Baptist teaching for the first time, although we should not dismiss the possibility that he had come to an understanding of Baptist principles before moving to Glasgow. Thereafter he appears to have been influenced by the enthusiasm for the evangelisation of the Highlands which was integral to the dissenting evangelical movement in Scotland. It is said that he began to preach immediately after his baptism, but it is not known where he operated, although he may have been active in Mid Argyll (Sheppard 1870; Sinclair 1810: 9).

Sinclair's links with Glasgow underline the importance of the Lowlands in the development and dissemination of Baptist principles in Scotland. The migration of Highlanders to the cities probably increased the awareness of Lowland congregations

with regard to the potential mission-field in the north, and, as we shall see, the first 'English' Baptist church in Glasgow sustained a lively interest in Baptist activity in Mid Argyll. By the 1820s there were at least two Baptist churches in the Lowlands which were so strongly supported by Highlanders that they could employ Gaelic-speaking pastors. The one was at Orangefield, Greenock, and the other in Glasgow. The Glasgow church met latterly at South Portland Street, and from 1820 it was led by Alexander McLeod, a former itinerant missionary in Perthshire, who was the first Highland missionary to be supported by Christopher Anderson. It was here that Dugald Sinclair's future wife, Christina, was baptised by immersion, although she was evidently familiar with Baptist principles before she moved to Glasgow in 1820 (Kilgour 1888; Meek 1987: 25; Meek 1988a).

When Dugald Sinclair began to preach in 1801, he did so in a lay capacity, and he evidently remained a layman until his ordination to the pastorate of the Lochgilphead church about 1815. He also lacked any formal training at this stage, and he was probably dependent upon such education as he had acquired in his boyhood. There is no clear indication that he received any formal schooling, but his warm approval of the work of the SSPCK (Sinclair 1810: 15-16) may suggest that he had attended one of their schools in his native district. His journals show that, in later life, he could write both Gaelic and English, with a remarkable skill in English prose style. His fluency in English doubtless reflects the years he spent in England, for in 1806 he went to Bradford Baptist Academy to be trained formally as an itinerant missionary. On the roll of the Academy he is identified with Bellanoch, at the west end of the Crinan Canal, where a Baptist church had been constituted only a year earlier in 1805 (Northern Education Society Reports 1804-25).

## The Baptists of Bellanoch

The years between 1801 and 1805 were a period of small-scale but significant activity by Baptist missionaries in the islands of the Clyde estuary and in mainland Argyll. Bute and Cowal were being roused by the preaching of Donald McArthur, a powerful evangelist who had once been a curer and carrier of herrings in the Kyles of Bute. Like Dugald Sinclair, McArthur had discovered believer's baptism in 1801, and he abandoned his secular calling immediately to become an itinerant preacher. It is said that he formed a congregation in the parish of Strachur in 1801 (Yuille 1926: 63). In 1804 McArthur was ordained to the Baptist ministry, his ordination taking place in Edinburgh, and he became the pastor of a congregation which he had established at Port Bannatyne, Bute, and which soon grew to over 170 members. McArthur met with stiff opposition, and a Cowal landlord, John Campbell of South Hall, caused him to be seized and press-ganged in 1805. Following his release by the Admiralty, McArthur fought, and won, a major action for damages against Campbell in the Court of Session in 1808. This triumph did not, however, put an end to the persecution, and McArthur was forced to emigrate to North America

by 1811. His departure weakened the Port Bannatyne church and doubtless also the small churches at Dunoon and Orangefield, Greenock, which his labours had helped to found (Buchanan 1813: 60-72; Meek 1988a, 1988b).

The pattern of Baptist activity in Mid Argyll is similar to that in Bute and Cowal in those years, and it is probable that Donald McArthur's influence was felt to the north of Loch Fyne. In 1803 a 'preacher' called Donald McArthur was resident at Craiglas, which was in the parish of South Knapdale and not far away from Lochgilphead (Military List 1803). In the same year, another Baptist preacher, Donald McVicar, was active in Mid Argyll, where he too had begun his labours around 1801. McVicar, who was probably a native of Mid Argyll, had attended a Haldane training-class in Glasgow with a view to being employed in the Society for Propagating the Gospel at Home, but his adoption of Baptist principles closed this avenue of service. Around this time it would seem that he had associated himself with the 'English' Baptist church in Glasgow, whose pastor had baptised Dugald Sinclair. By 1805, and probably from the time of its constitution in 1801, the Glasgow church had an interest in missionary outreach to the Highlands. In July 1805 it was visited by Andrew Fuller, an influential Baptist minister at Kettering, Northamptonshire. Fuller was the first secretary of the Baptist Missionary Society, and he had come to Scotland to collect funds for its mission to India (Meek 1987: 8-9). In his journal Fuller wrote thus about the Glasgow church:

> They are a poor people, and but few in number; yet they collected about eight pounds. This little church also supports a mission in the Highlands of Scotland, where a new society has lately been formed.

Fuller went on to quote from a letter which he had received from 'their missionary' (doubtless Donald McVicar) in Bellanoch, who informed him that 'we have raised a little church here; the number of our members is only twelve' (Morris 1816: 140-1; Yuille 1926: 116).

The Bellanoch church was constituted on 27 April 1805, and Donald McVicar was ordained as its pastor on the same day. This event was attended by two men who had links with the Baptist church in Glasgow which supported McVicar's labours. The one was James Deakin, a deacon of the church, and the other was Christopher Anderson, who was a member of the church for a brief period. Anderson, who was about to leave for England in order to train for missionary service in India, had a major part in the services which were held when the Bellanoch church was constituted. The service of constitution and ordination on the Saturday was followed by a baptismal service on the Sunday, and Anderson has provided a description of the circumstances of that day:

> This morning the three persons . . . were baptized by Mr McVicar. One of them about sixty, another about seventy! He used the Gaelic in baptizing two of them. We met in the open air about 11 A.M. While Brother Deakin was reading the Scriptures, we were interrupted by Malcolm of Dotrune's [i.e., Duntroon's] factor, who said he had a general order to stop all such

> preaching on the estate, and would call out the Volunteers if we did not desist! We removed to another place, and got all our hearers with us (Anderson 1854: 26-7).

The passage suggests that open-air preaching by dissenters was relatively common on the estate of the Malcolms of Poltalloch (as the family is now known), and it indicates that the Malcolms were hostile to the practice, as were other landlords in Argyll (Meek 1987: 13). Yet it was difficult to enforce a 'general order' throughout an area extending from Mid Argyll to North Knapdale, and the Bellanoch church was able to survive, and even to prosper, in spite of such opposition.

The location of this early Baptist church at Bellanoch, rather than Lochgilphead, to which it moved in 1815, is a matter of some interest. It indicates that its main body of support lay in this area, and it seems probable that many of its members and adherents lived in North Knapdale, where the kelp industry was of importance in maintaining the population into the early years of the nineteenth century (Rymer 1974: 127-32). Like many Baptist churches of this period, the Bellanoch church met in an 'upper room', probably a hay-loft above a byre, which would have been granted to it by a member or sympathiser. The baptism of candidates was administered in Bellanoch Bay (Yuille 1926: 116), in keeping with the Baptists' practice of baptising individuals in suitable bays, lochs or streams before the advent of indoor baptistries.

The choice of Bellanoch as the location of the church may have been influenced to some extent by industrial developments in this part of Argyll. In 1801 the Crinan Canal was opened to shipping. Vessels sailing north were thus able to enter the canal at Ardrishaig and proceed *via* Bellanoch to the sea-lock at Crinan, and thence to the Hebrides and beyond. Work on this important water-way had begun after the passing of the Crinan Canal Act in 1793, and its construction brought navvies and overseers to the district (Cameron 1978: 12-17). Some of these incomers, and particularly the overseers, were sympathetic to itinerant peachers who held services by the canal. Those who adhered to the Antiburghers were given regular services by that denomination, and such activity helped to increase evangelical awareness in the district, as was evident to Niel Douglas, a minister of the Relief Church, when he preached at the canal in 1797 (Douglas 1799: 104–7). Structural difficulties and leakages meant that engineering work continued until 1817, and it is probable that labourers would have been billeted along the banks of the canal throughout the period of its building and improvement (Cameron 1978: 16-17). The Bellanoch church was therefore well placed to minister to the body of men who were employed at the canal, in addition to the indigenous members of its congregation.

Its geographical location, however, provided the Bellanoch church with an opportunity to exercise a ministry which extended well beyond the banks of the Crinan Canal. Its position allowed easy access to Kintyre and Mid Argyll, as well as the Hebrides. There is reason to believe that it was contemplating a missionary outreach to these areas by 1805 or at least 1806. As we have noted previously, Andrew Fuller refers in 1805 to the 'new society' which had 'lately been formed' in the Highlands with the support of the 'English'

Baptist church in Glasgow. The context of his remarks suggests that this 'society' had been formed in Bellanoch. In using the term 'society', Fuller may be referring simply to the Bellanoch church itself. On the other hand, he may mean that a society for the support of missionary outreach had been formed by that church, with the help of the mother church in Glasgow. The existence of some sort of arrangement for this purpose seems all the more probable in the light of Dugald Sinclair's career, since it was in 1806 that he proceeded to Bradford Baptist Academy to train as an itinerant missionary. A missionary of this kind would normally have been maintained by a society, and as there was no other Baptist itinerant society in Scotland at this time, it is reasonable to conclude that one had been formed at Bellanoch with the express purpose of evangelising the West Highlands.

When the Bellanoch church sent Dugald Sinclair to train at Bradford Baptist Academy in the West Riding of Yorkshire, it recognised that there was no Baptist academy in Scotland at which he could be instructed in itinerant evangelism. By contrast, several such academies existed in England, where they had been developed as a means of instructing missionaries and pastors of dissenting persuasion, who were not allowed entrance to English universities. The English dissenting academies offered practical training in rural evangelism in addition to sound academic tuition. Bradford Academy was founded in 1805, and William Steadman had become its first president. Steadman, who had trained at Bristol Baptist College, had spent some time as an itinerant evangelist in Cornwall, and he was an important promoter of rural itinerancy (Brown 1986: 123, 127–8). Steadman's reputation and the relative proximity of Bradford, compared with Bristol, may have induced Sinclair to pursue his studies there. The course lasted for about three years, during which Sinclair preached every Sunday in the Bradford district, and acquired a mastery of Greek, for which he was noted in later years (Sheppard 1870).

Bradford attracted another Highlander in the same year as Dugald Sinclair. This was Peter McFarlane from Luss, who had experienced evangelical conversion through the preaching of Donald McArthur, and had entered college with the support of the 'English' Baptist church at Kilwinning, whose pastor was George Barclay (Northern Education Society Reports 1804–25; Thomson 1902: 28). It was at the Kilwinning church that Sinclair was 'set apart' for itinerant ministry in 1810, with Christopher Anderson, George Barclay and Peter McFarlane taking part in the service.

Sinclair's 'setting apart' at Kilwinning, rather than Bellanoch, indicates that the structure for supporting his future work had changed and developed during his time in Bradford. The earlier aspirations of the Bellanoch church appear to have inspired Christopher Anderson to promote itinerant evangelism in the Highlands. When Anderson returned from his training in England in 1806, with his hope of going to India dashed by ill health, he set about gathering a Baptist church in Edinburgh, and he also began to itinerate in the Highlands. In this he was supported by his close friend, George Barclay of Kilwinning, and by the end of 1807 they were both conducting some degree of itinerant evangelism in accessible Highland districts. By 1808 they had engaged a Gaelic-speaking evangelist, Alexander McLeod, who was stationed first at Perth and later at Crieff. The

second itinerant evangelist to be employed by Barclay and Anderson was Dugald Sinclair (Sinclair 1810: 3-5; Thomson 1902: 27-8).

## Missionary Journals

Immediately after his 'setting apart' in Kilwinning, Dugald Sinclair embarked on his first recorded journey as a full-time itinerant missionary with the support of George Barclay and Christopher Anderson. The organisation which was set up by Barclay and Anderson was later known as the Scotch Itinerant Society (Anderson 1854: 127), or the Baptist Itinerant Society (Yuille 1926: 69-71). Sinclair's journals, which preserve a detailed record of his major tours between 1810 and 1815, were intended not only to maintain contact between himself and Anderson, who acted as the secretary of the society, but also to provide a means of generating interest among the wider body of the society's supporters, many of whom were in the Lowlands and in England. The writing of journals, commonly describing one's travels in different parts of the world, was a well-attested practice in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The genre had been used effectively by the celebrated leaders of the Evangelical Revival in the eighteenth century, George Whitefield and John Wesley, whose journals doubtless provided a model for later evangelists (Wesley 1987; Whitefield 1978). In such journals, travelogue and adventure narrative are blended with spiritual autobiography of a type which is common among Puritan and other spiritually introspective writers of an earlier period. Sinclair's journals conform to this pattern, and their style suggests strongly that he knew that they were intended for a wide readership with a taste for writing of this kind. Nevertheless, stylistic self-consciousness does not dominate his writing. He usually writes easily and naturally, and sections of his journals were obviously written like diaries, describing the events of each day. Freshness and vividness abound, and ponderous writing is kept under control.

Sinclair's awareness of his readership probably implies that he has exercised some degree of editorial discretion in the choice and tone of the material covered by his journals. Further editing was undoubtedly carried out by Christopher Anderson, who published the first of the journals in 1814. Although Anderson was a Baptist with strong convictions, he was always careful not to antagonise those who did not share his views, and it seems likely that his society would have been supported by some sympathisers who were not Baptists. It is noticeable that Sinclair's journals do not contain any description of a baptismal service, although it is known from other sources that he conducted such services in the years covered by the journals. Indeed, a strongly apologetic sermon preached by him at a baptismal service in Colonsay about 1814 was remembered in Colonsay tradition a century later (McNeill 1914: 5-6). It is also apparent that the printed journals make little of the opposition which Sinclair encountered in certain parts of the Highlands. Initial disputes with the lairds of Coll and Colonsay are known from other sources (McNeill 1914: 9-11; Yuille 1926: 115), but they are not mentioned in the journals, and any reference in the journals to tumult or commotion is markedly vague.

Such reticence with regard to baptism and the attitude of secular authorities stands in contrast to the somewhat aggressive style of the early days of dissenting evangelicalism, when the movement was dominated by Robert and James Haldane, and it probably reflects a deliberately eirenic posture. In view of the bad feeling which was created by the Haldanes' adoption of Baptist principles in 1808 and their rejection of Congregationalism (Meek and Murray 1988), it may also be significant that Sinclair's journals show close co-operation between Congregationalists and Baptists, and make no reference to any underlying tensions between the two groups. It is, however, important to note that Sinclair operated in the west, where such tensions were probably less noticeable than in the east, especially in Perthshire. Nevertheless, it is claimed in another source that a group of Baptists in Arran were strongly opposed by the Congregational pastor of Sannox, Alexander MacKay, from whose church they had seceded. Indeed, it is said that Sinclair had to plead with MacKay on their behalf (Butchart 1949: 126-7), but in the journals MacKay is portrayed as Sinclair's close friend and fellow itinerant, and as a man whose soul was 'at liberty and removed from the trammels of party distinction' (Sinclair 1812: 16).

Although Sinclair's journals do appear to avoid commenting explicitly on contentious issues, they are nevertheless of fundamental importance to our understanding of the growth of dissenting evangelicalism in the west Highlands and the Inner Hebrides. No other comparable journals dealing with all of these areas are known to survive for this period, and accounts of religious movements written by Gaelic-speaking observers are something of a rarity before 1815. Besides their religious interest, the journals give a vivid glimpse of Highland society at the beginning of a century of momentous change, and provide a unique picture of the life of an itinerant missionary in the Highland context.

The pattern of Sinclair's itineraries can be observed clearly in his writings. The first of his six journeys, undertaken in 1810, was the longest, and involved a tour of the east and west Highlands lasting some six months. Although this tour included preaching and tract-distribution, it had an exploratory dimension, since Sinclair was trying to ascertain the desire for education in western districts. The eastern districts were covered at the same time by Christopher Anderson, who travelled as far as Beauly, where he met Sinclair. In November 1810 Anderson took the initiative in forming the Edinburgh Society for the Support of Gaelic Schools, and there can be no doubt that Sinclair's first tour was something of a fact-finding mission for this venture (Meek 1987: 15).

The subsequent five recorded tours had smaller itineraries, and concentrated on the Argyll mainland and the Inner Hebrides, including Arran, which Sinclair visited regularly. These tours resemble a circuit, similar to that of English Methodist preachers, in which Sinclair preached as an evangelist and provided pastoral care for converts. (See Figures 1 and 2.) In 1814 he reached as far west as Tiree, and intended to sail to the Outer Hebrides, but he was prevented from doing so by bad weather (Sinclair 1814: 15). It is claimed that he was active in Lewis (Yuille 1926: 70), evidently in the period after 1815. Sinclair, of course, continued his itinerant ministry in the years between 1815 and 1831, and it is clear that he visited districts not covered in his recorded tours of 1810-15.

## Pathways of Dissent

At the outset of his work Sinclair travelled alone on his missionary tours. Although it was the policy of the Scotch Itinerant Society that missionaries should operate in pairs, their number was so small and finance so limited in the early years that this was seldom possible (Anderson 1854: 117). When he began his labours, Sinclair was, in fact, the only full-time Baptist evangelist in the West Highlands who was engaged solely in itinerant activity. Other Baptist evangelists, who were few in number, held pastoral charges which would have restricted their itinerant labours to certain times of the year, principally the summer. The scarcity of Baptist missionaries was such that Sinclair was glad to have the temporary support of the Congregationalists. In 1812 he was able to enlist the companionship of Alexander MacKay, of the Congregational church in Sannox, Arran (Sinclair 1812: 16). MacKay joined Sinclair in Islay, and accompanied him to Mull. Given their differing interpretations of the mode of baptism, this could scarcely have been a wholly satisfactory arrangement, but the two men were evidently close friends and apparently enjoyed a good working relationship.

In 1814 and 1815 Sinclair had the services of two young men, who were able to provide some degree of comapanionship, and who also gave notice of the preacher's presence in the district, the time of his sermons and their location. In this way potential missionaries could be given some practical training in missionary work. Indeed, Sinclair's companion of 1814, John Paul, entered Bradford Baptist Academy in 1818.[1] Sometimes Sinclair was able to observe, with wry amusement, the misfortunes of his young companions, especially in the worst of Highland weather. When attempting to leave Colonsay in a small boat in September 1815, Sinclair and his assistant, George, ran into heavy seas:

> The wind abating, George, having risen very early, fell asleep, and while he continued his slumbers, the sea again got very rough. One billow appeared, aiming at our little boat; when it approached, it intercepted our view of the Jura mountains. The man at the helm held her prow to it; when it broke and sprung over us, part of the wave, in falling, coming into the boat, struck poor George, and awoke him! This was the first time he appeared afraid at sea (Sinclair 1815: 10).

Storms at sea and on land were a common experience, and so too were treacherous roads, bogs, and rivers in spate. Sinclair's earlier journals contain more references to hardships of this kind than do the later ones, and it would seem that, like his assistants, he himself became more robust as the years passed. Nevertheless, he was often assailed by sore heads, colds and fatigues. His itinerancies were conducted mainly on foot, and he was conveyed between islands by fishing-boats of varying size and by sailing packets, when such conveniences were available.

While travelling, Sinclair was frequently dependent on sympathetic friends for accommodation, and he probably planned his journeys carefully, so that he could take advantage of hospitality of this kind. Yet he also had to procure lodgings with strangers,

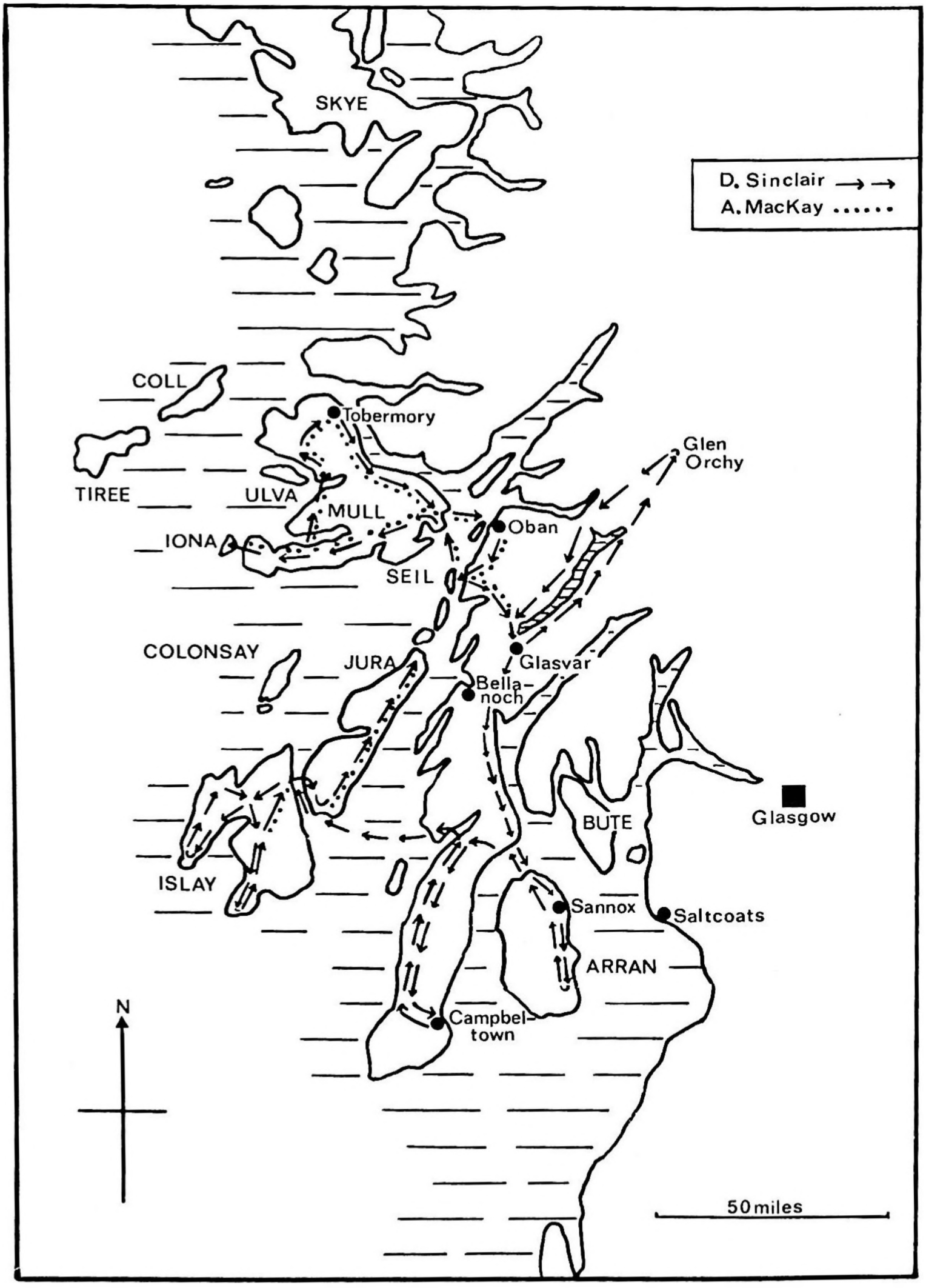


Fig. 1 Dugald Sinclair's 1812 Itinerary.

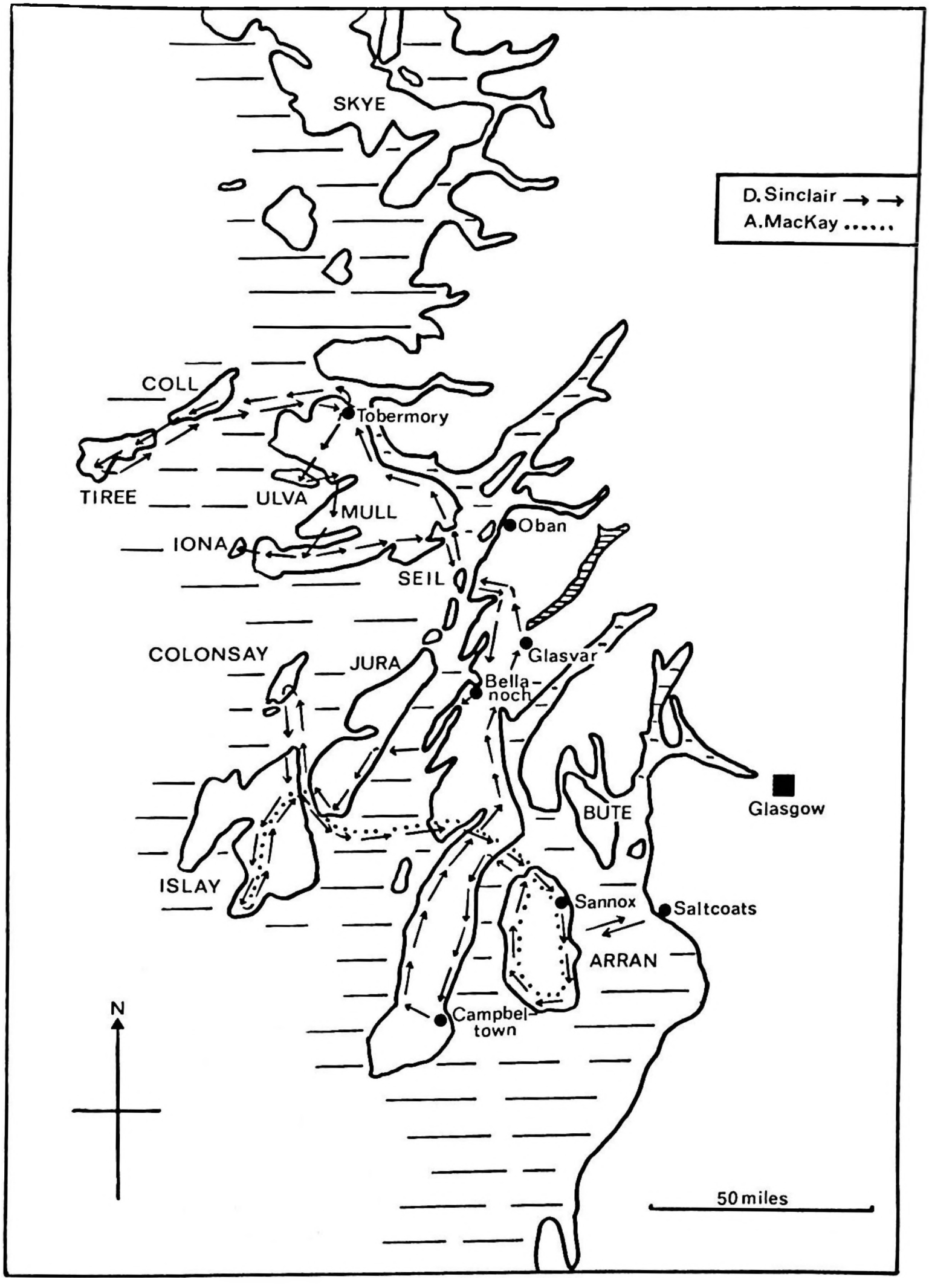


Fig. 2 Dugald Sinclair's 1814 Itinerary.

often in inns. Inns were found in the larger villages, commonly where routes converged. They were therefore strategic places, in which the itinerant evangelist could find 'captive' audiences to listen to his message. If the inn-keeper were kindly disposed, he would grant permission for a room to be used for preaching, and Sinclair was careful to reward the inn-keeper generously in such circumstances. Inns were, however, very noisy places, and occasionally Sinclair had to tolerate rowdy behaviour, which disturbed his night's rest. The remedy was to summon the carousers and to preach an appropriate sermon. This sometimes had the desired effect of bringing peace. In the inn at Lagg in Jura, however, Sinclair once had to endure an all-night orgy by sailors who had little regard for the sermon which he had previously preached to them (Sinclair 1810: 18; 1811: 13-14).

In procuring premises suitable for preaching, Sinclair was also helped by friends and by those who admired the aims of his work. Farmhouses, cottages and barns would often be made available. Open-air preaching was nevertheless a general feature of his work, and circumvented the problem of refusal of premises. Some care was taken to find a convenient location which would be accessible to people from a wide area. Prominent sites were chosen where possible, so as to attract attention. On the other hand, preaching could take place wherever there was a sizeable group of people which had already gathered for another purpose; thus Sinclair preached at the spa at Strathpeffer in 1810, and in a harvest field in Jura in 1812 (Sinclair 1810: 19; 1812: 27). The run-rig farms were better populated than the open countryside, and Sinclair devoted noticeable attention to such farms in Islay and Arran. The slate quarries of Easdale and the coalmines of Campbeltown furnished employment for people in these localities, and these locations provided enthusiastic listeners in 1810 and 1811. In towns and villages it was easier to summon the people, and in the larger towns the bellman might occasionally co-operate by giving notice of a sermon, as happened in Dingwall in 1810 (Sinclair 1810: 19, 25; 1811: 10-12).

Sinclair was very much aware of the importance of gathering as big an audience as circumstances would allow, and on most occasions he tried to calculate the size of his congregations. While the figures which he provides in his journals can be little more than estimates, they offer a valuable guide to the attention which his preaching aroused. Close scrutiny of these figures shows that, while he tended to attract the largest audiences fairly consistently in towns and villages and in areas of relatively high population density, attendance was often controlled by factors which were much more important than demography.

Of fundamental significance was the question of whether an adequate ministry was provided by the Established Church within its parishes. 'Adequacy' is to be defined at two levels in this context. First there was the question of whether ecclesiastical provision in the locality was satisfactory in terms of churches which were conveniently accessible to the people. In Argyll, as in other parts of the Highlands, parishes were very large indeed, and Christopher Anderson was well aware of this when he stationed Sinclair in Argyll; there was, in his view, a need for 'a sort of constant Itineracy' (Sinclair 1811: 4) to make up the deficiencies in the parish system. It is noticeable that Sinclair was well supported

in his native district. While audience figures are not strikingly high, they are consistent, and he was assured of having 'great numbers' to listen to him in such areas of Mid Argyll as the Black Moss (Sinclair 1810: 9). When itinerating in Wester Ross in 1810, Sinclair commented forcibly on the size of parishes and the difficulty of ensuring spiritual provision, even when the ministers were Evangelicals:

> The parishes of Gairloch and Loch Broom . . . are so enormously extensive, that the remote parts of them . . . are miserably off for want of the bread of life. Though the Gospel is preached by the Ministers of these parishes, still it is impossible for the people in the places mentioned, to hear them but seldom (Sinclair 1810: 17).

This probably explains why he was able to attract 'a great many people' at Inverasdale, and 200 to 300 people at Taynafillan on the far side of Loch Ewe (Sinclair 1810: 14-15).

The second consideration of importance was whether there was a minister currently resident in the parish. The point can be illustrated with regard to Sinclair's experiences in parishes which were vacant. In Tayvallich in June 1810, he preached 'twice in Gaelic to perhaps 400 people, in English once, to a few only'. He comments: 'In this parish, which is at present vacant, the people come out well to hear the word of life' (Sinclair 1810: 9). At Milton of Redcastle, Sinclair in 1810 preached to 'a considerable number of people, perhaps about 150 or 200'. This was in contrast to relatively low numbers elsewhere in the Black Isle, and he noted that the likely explanation was a dispute about presentation which had resulted in a four-year vacancy in the parish (Sinclair 1810: 20). In 1813 Sinclair re-visited the parish of Kilmallie, which he had previously visited in 1810, and had a Sunday audience of 200 'from all parts of the parish' (Sinclair 1813: 26). His congregation was no doubt increased by the effects of a dispute lasting from 1812 to 1816 and involving the presentees of two rival patrons (*FES* 1923: 135). This dispute was noted by Christopher Anderson in his introduction to Sinclair's journal of 1813 (Sinclair 1813: 5), and there can be little doubt that both Anderson and Sinclair were well aware of the extent to which parish vacancies and patronage quarrels weakened clerical provision by the Established Church. Yet the long-term evidence shows that the people's interest in itinerant preachers during parish vacancies seldom produced lasting results conducive to dissent. When a parish vacancy was satisfactorily resolved by means of a presentee whom the people favoured, they tended to return to the parish church, and the old loyalties were quickly re-asserted. This was demonstrated very clearly in 1815, when Dugald Sinclair battled his way through a storm to visit the island of Gigha. He received a cold response from the islanders:'"Why," say they, "we were all last year without a minister; but now we have our own. Had you come then, you would have been joyfully welcome . . ."' (Sinclair 1815: 15). When he arranged a sermon, his audience comprised only one man and his servants!

The response to Sinclair's preaching was also controlled to some extent by the theological affiliation of the ministers in the parishes. The ministers of many parishes, especially in Argyll, were Moderates, and, although Sinclair does not comment on this,

it is probable that a growing evangelical awareness on the part of the people contributed to his audiences. Sinclair clearly hoped to increase people's ability to distinguish between Evangelicals and Moderates, since at one meeting he recounted how a prominent minister of the Established Church, Alexander Stewart of Moulin, formerly a Moderate, had become an Evangelical, with a consequent shift in the emphasis of his preaching (Sinclair 1810: 24-5).

It is apparent that the work of Evangelical ministers and parish missionaries likewise boosted attendance at Sinclair's meetings. Thus, during the temporary absence of the Evangelical missionary, Donald MacGillivray, from Kilmallie in 1810, Sinclair preached to substantial audiences at Fort William (Sinclair 1810: 10). Sinclair, of course, was on good terms with Evangelical parish ministers, and would attend their services when he happened to be in their localities. Nevertheless, the labours of such ministers did not always help his own cause. Nowhere was this more saliently demonstrated than in the island of Arran, which was in the grip of a strong religious awakening from 1812. The development of this awakening was due in large measure to the presence of an Evangelical minister, Neil MacBride, in the parish of Kilmorie in the south of the island. In the north of the island, the movement was invigorated by the preaching of Sinclair's close friend and fellow itinerant, Alexander MacKay, of the Congregational church at Sannox. Sinclair was delighted to visit Arran, where he enjoyed cordial relations with MacBride as well as MacKay. The response to his preaching was always very encouraging, but the leadership of MacKay and MacBride ensured that the fruit of the revival was shared by the Established Church and the Congregational church. A small number of Baptists emerged, but they were not strong, and no Baptist church was formed in the island (Sinclair 1812: 9-17; 1813: 9; 1814: 25-8; 1815: 16-18; Butchart 1949: 126-7).

A remarkable degree of collaboration between the Established Church and the dissenting movement is apparent in Arran. This stands in marked contrast to the situation in the north-west Highlands, where Sinclair encountered a brand of Evangelicalism which had already developed a strong lay leadership consisting of catechists and 'The Men'. In a letter written to one of his supporters in 1810, Sinclair gave reasons for his lack of success in the north-west, writing with a candour which is not attested in his journals:

> Those parishes in Ross-shire, where they have reputed Gospel ministers, and a few devout private persons, are, in general, the places where the people turn out worst. In these parts the multitude look up to the example of the few reputed holy, and these give them no encouragement to hear us. I have many proofs of this. Yesterday, after preaching in a country village, I was dismissing the people, when the catechist, a holy man in their opinion, was passing. He stood and asked what this gathering meant; being told by one of the hearers, he again asked, 'Who is the minister?' The other pointed to me, on which he said, 'You have litle work to do at home when you would come out in this manner to hear these men' (Anderson 1854: 115).

If matters of spiritual provision were of significance in determining the response to Sinclair's preaching, physical considerations were also of some importance. In a rural

society the rhythms of labour and seasonal occupations contributed to, or detracted from, the success of the itinerant missionary. At Lochbroom in 1810 Sinclair was able to take advantage of the fact that the herring season had not yet started, and fishermen were still ashore (Sinclair 1810: 15). In the Inner Hebridean islands of Mull, Coll and Tiree, the kelp industry was in full swing in this period, and the people were sometimes unable to attend his meetings because of their work (Sinclair 1814: 14, 16-17). Since Sinclair travelled frequently at the end of the summer and in the autumn, he encountered such problems with regard to harvest. People were unwilling to leave this important event in the agrarian cycle. Nevertheless, it would seem that they were sometimes particularly responsive at this time of the year, perhaps because their communal psychology was to some degree controlled by the failure or success of harvests. When harvesters left their labour to attend a religious service, it was usually indicative of deep spiritual interest of the kind associated with revivals or awakenings. In Jura in 1812, Sinclair found unusual interest among harvesters in a field:

> Reaching a field, where the inhabitants of the farm were reaping close by the public road, we asked, Can you spare an hour for the gospel and your souls, though your harvest is necessary? They frankly, and without hesitation, said, 'Indeed we can, and are glad to have it in our power to do so.' They gathered into a corner of the field, close by the road, and patiently and attentively heard the word. The inhabitants of the farm which we had left behind, on seeing these waiting to hear the word, dropped their sickles all to a man, and with post-haste came to hear, except one individual, who made not his appearance among his neighbours. After brother Mck[ay] who preached, had done, we distributed a few tracts among them, and the people were dismissed with apparent satisfaction (Sinclair 1812: 27).

Sinclair met with a similar response in other parts of Jura at this time, and this almost certainly indicates that a spiritual awakening was in progress throughout the island.

Dissenting missionaries could undoubtedly benefit from the development of awakenings of this kind, since they helped to loosen the bonds which linked the people to the Established Church. However, a missionary who travelled on a circuit and visited a locality only occasionally was not in a strong position to take advantage of such movements, and the shortness of his visits meant that a firm foundation for future dissent could not be laid easily. Sinclair's journals do, in fact, suggest that his success in particular localities was related to the amount of time which he could spend among the people. In Tiree in June 1814, it is noticeable that the number of his hearers increased gradually during the week that he was able to spend on the island; from 70 initially, to 150, and then to a remarkable 1,000 (out of a population of 3,500) at his final sermon on Sunday 26 June (Sinclair 1814: 12-15). Sinclair was apparently not able to build on the sympathy which he had engendered, and the establishment of a Baptist cause in Tiree did not progress until the island had a resident Baptist missionary after 1824 (Meek 1988c).

Tiree epitomised the circumstances in which the dissenting movement had most to gain, provided that a missionary could visit regularly. With the neighbouring island of

Coll it formed a single large parish, and the minister was a Moderate. Provision of services was on Sundays only, whereas itinerant preachers were prepared to preach on week-days. As Sinclair noted, 'The people are quite astonished that a minister should trouble himself to preach on a *week* day; it is entirely new to them' (Sinclair 1814: 13). Very similar circumstances prevailed in the islands of Islay and Colonsay, which Sinclair was able to visit more fequently, thus ensuring some continuity of ministry. In Islay, which he visited in each of the years from 1811 to 1815, he found a particularly favourable response in the districts of the Rhinns and the Oa, with large attendances at most of the services. In the Rhinns, Sinclair's work was undoubtedly aided significantly by the earlier labours of a schoolmaster, with whom he formed a close working relationship (Sinclair 1811: 16-25). Schoolmasters, especially those associated with the Edinburgh Society for the Support of Gaelic Schools, had a crucial role in the development of evangelicalism in the Highlands (Meek 1987: 15-16).

In Colonsay, the response to Sinclair's preaching in 1814–15 was perhaps more enthusiastic than in any other area covered by his journals. Sinclair first visited the island on 18 August 1814, and remained until 2 September, his departure having been delayed by bad weather. He found a people who were starved of regular ministerial provision of any kind. At this time the island was linked with Jura as a single parish, and, as the parish minister resided in Jura, ministerial provision in Colonsay was extremely poor. Consequently the islanders embraced Sinclair's ministry with 'joyful gratitude', and audiences gradually increased to 400 (out of a population of about 800). When he returned to the island in early September 1815, congregations were of a similar size, and the islanders pleaded with him to visit them as frequently as possible. Once again, storms delayed his departure, and spiritual interest deepened noticeably, with all the signs of an awakening in the community. The foundation of Colonsay Baptist Church was the direct result, and Sinclair visited it annually until his emigration in 1831 (Sinclair 1814: 19-21; 1815: 7-11; McNeill 1914: 8).

The key to Sinclair's successes and failures thus lay very largely in the nature of the provision given by the Established Church in Highland parishes. The Established Church was itself well aware of the inadequacies of the parish system by the 1820s, when the fruit of dissent was becoming more evident. In 1824 an Act of Parliament authorised the improvement of the Church's provision by building about forty so-called 'parliamentary churches' in over-large parishes. Some of these churches were built in those very districts where Sinclair had met with greatest success in the period before 1820, noticeably in Islay (at Kilmeny, the Oa, and Portnahaven) and at Lochgilphead. These latter districts were subsequently disjoined as *quoad sacra* parishes in the late 1840s. Colonsay became a *quoad omnia* parish, with its first resident minister, in 1861 (*FES* 1923: 19, 63, 69-71, 74-9; MacLeòid 1980).

Although Sinclair's work benefited from the difficulties faced by the Established Church, it needs to be emphasised that the dissenting movement was itself less than firmly grounded in the West Highlands. It too suffered initially from an acute shortage of

manpower. Itinerancy could not hope to provide firm support for the dissenting congregations which began to emerge, and the career of Sinclair illustrates that it placed an enormous burden on the shoulders of one individual. In addition, the movement was particularly vulnerable to the effects of social change, since it depended very largely on the maintenance of stable congregations, and lacked any central organisation. After 1815 Highland society began to feel the effects of economic slump, and the consequences of this were to have a strong bearing on the ministry of Dugald Sinclair in later years.

## The Lochgilphead Years

Sinclair's journals terminate at the point where he became the pastor of what is now Lochgilphead Baptist Church. The Lochgilphead church is, in fact, the Bellanoch church in a new setting. When Sinclair was formally ordained to the pastoral charge of this congregation, it had not yet moved to its new location. Sinclair had a leading role in establishing the church in Lochgilphead, since he purchased the site on which it built its chapel. On 10 August 1815 a plot of ground was assigned by feu charter to 'the Rev. Dugald Sinclair residing at Glassvar' by John McNeill of Oakfield. Subsequently, on 10 June 1819, the ownership of the ground 'with the Baptist Chapel thereon' was transferred by Sinclair to the Trustees for the Society of Calvinistic Baptists at Lochgilphead (Sasines 1820).

Dugald Sinclair succeeded Donald McVicar as pastor of the Bellanoch church. McVicar, who had been pastor of this congregation since its constitution in 1805, relinquished his charge in 1814, and he appears to have emigrated to Canada shortly afterwards. By 1818 he was resident in Aldborough, Elgin County, Ontario, where he was ministering to a group of Scottish emigrants which included McKillops, Fergusons, McKellars and Robertsons. It seems highly likely that these emigrants included members or adherents of the church at Bellanoch, and that McVicar had emigrated to be their pastor. In 1820 a further group of emigrants from Argyll had arrived in Lobo, Middlesex County, Ontario, where they were visited periodically by McVicar (Butchart 1949: 385, 393). The evidence thus suggests that emigration to Ontario from Mid Argyll and North Knapdale was taking place from at least 1814, and that it was having an effect on the Bellanoch church. McVicar's emigration may well indicate that an influential body of people from that church, perhaps even the majority of its membership, had preceded him to Canada (Meek 1988b). Emigration from North Knapdale was probably hastened by the early decline of the kelp industry in that district (Rymer 1974: 131).

When the remaining members of the Bellanoch church decided to move their location to Lochgilphead, they may have been influenced by the decline in the size of the church and the accompanying depopulation of its locality. They would also have been aware that Lochgilphead was growing as a town, partly as a result of the drift of population from the rural areas. An evangelist like Sinclair would have been quick to appreciate the opportunities

for evangelism which the town would afford, the more so since the Church of Scotland had not yet established a presence in the immediate neighbourhood. When the Baptist chapel in Lochgilphead was built, it was the only place of worship between Kilmichael and Inverneill (Yuille 1926: 116), and it was not until 1828 that the Church of Scotland erected a parliamentary church in the district (*FES* 1923: 19).

Dugald Sinclair's appointment as pastor of the Bellanoch congregation at a critical time in its history probably added substantially to his work-load, and it is not surprising that his published journals terminate when they do. Yet he continued to itinerate extensively in the West Highlands and Hebrides in later years, and he wrote annual accounts of his labours for the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland, which assumed responsibility for his work in 1827. This society was an amalgamation of the several Baptist bodies which had previously supported itinerant evangelism in the Highlands, and it absorbed the society which had been created by Christopher Anderson and George Barclay (Yuille 1926: 71-6). There are few surviving references to Sinclair's work in the years between 1815 and 1828, but we need not doubt that he pursued his calling vigorously in this period.

By 1828 the scale of Baptist activity in the West Highlands and Hebrides had increased noticeably since the days of Sinclair's first missionary journeys. Baptist congregations were now meeting regularly in Islay, Colonsay, Mull (at Tobermory and in the Ross), Tiree, Skye (at Uig and Broadford) and in the vicinity of Oban. Baptist missionaries were stationed in Islay, Mull and Skye, and a Gaelic schoolmaster, Duncan MacDougall, was preaching in Tiree (Meek 1988a, 1988c). Some of the congregations formed themselves into churches in the course of the 1830s. Such development owed much to Dugald Sinclair, who laid the foundations of the churches, and exercised pastoral oversight of the missionaries and their congregations until 1831. His contribution can be seen at Inveraray, for instance, where a missionary station had been established in 1825 under the leadership of John McMillan. McMillan was the son of the butler to the Laird of Colonsay. Having been brought to faith through Sinclair's preaching in Colonsay in 1817, he was baptised by him, and proceeded to Bradford Baptist Academy for training with the support of the Lochgilphead church (Northern Education Society Reports 1804-25; BHMS Report 1829: 26-8). McMillan was one of four young men who were sent to Bradford Academy by the Lochgilphead church in this period.[2]

In the 1820s Sinclair combined his preaching tours with the 'ordering' of the churches, and held some responsibility for the ordination of new pastors. In the summer of 1828, he was in Skye, where he had a major part in the ordination of William Fraser as pastor of the Baptist church in Uig. Thereafter he proceeded on a tour of the Inner Hebrides, and in the autumn he was active on the mainland, reaching as far north as Grantown-on-Spey (BHMS Report 1829: 33-6).

Besides his preaching and pastoral activities in the west, Dugald Sinclair participated to some degree in the wider work of Baptists in Scotland. On 13 June 1827 he was one of a number of pastors and deacons who attended a meeting in Edinburgh 'for the purpose of forming a Union of the Baptist Churches of Scotland' (Minute 1827). Although it did

not take practical effect, the desire to form this union was indicative of the growth of Baptist work in Scotland after 1800, and of the links which were felt to exist between different churches. Nowhere was this more evident than in the West Highlands and Hebrides, where Dugald Sinclair had nurtured a family of small but thriving Baptist congregations.

## Leaving Lochgilphead

Considering the progress of Baptist missionary work in Argyll and the Hebrides, it might have seemed possible in 1828 that Dugald Sinclair would have remained indefinitely in the region in order to consolidate and encourage the churches. Yet, in the summer of 1831, he took ship to Canada, accompanied by sixteen of the twenty-nine members of his church. As he was a prominent religious leader, it is of particular interest to investigate the circumstances of his departure. It can be assumed all too easily that he was a promoter of emigration, or that he exerted the essential influence which led to the depletion of the Lochgilphead church. Indeed, an account of his departure written a century later, in 1926, takes the latter view. We shall examine this account, but we need first to consider the contemporary evidence. This evidence includes Sinclair's reports to the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland in the years from 1828 to 1831, an extract from the letter of resignation which he sent to the society, and the society's own understanding of events.

In its report for 1831, the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland explained Sinclair's departure in the following terms:

> Mr SINCLAIR resided at Lochgilphead for several years, and his labours had been blessed for collecting a number of disciples who walked in the fellowship of the gospel. A considerable emigration from that part of the country to Upper Canada, has taken place for some years past, and many of the members of the church have removed. They had repeatedly requested Mr Sinclair to join them, which he declined. Finding, however, that a great part of the church had determined to follow their friends and brethren this year, he saw it his duty to accompany them, along with his family . . . Sixteen members of the church accompanied Mr Sinclair, and thirteen remain. They applied to the society for another preacher; and although the prospects of usefulness have not for some time been so good at Lochgilphead as formerly, yet as there is an excellent field for preaching the gospel in the neighbourhood, Mr JOHN MACINTOSH [*sic*], of Stornoway, has proceeded to that station (BHMS Report 1831: 6-7).

The society thus placed Sinclair's departure firmly in the context of the persistent flow of emigration from Lochgilphead and the surrounding district. The intensity and destination of the emigrant tide in the 1820s can be corroborated from the Canadian side, principally in the records of Middlesex County, Ontario, which received many of the emigrants from mainland Argyll in this period. These show that emigrants from Argyll settled in most of the Middlesex townships, but it is of particular interest that numerous emigrants from

Knapdale and Lochgilphead settled in Lobo Township in the late 1820s. Mosa Township, too, appears to have been a popular location for Argyll emigrants, whose number included Dugald Sinclair's brother, Donald, who emigrated in 1830. Evidence from Canadian sources further suggests that the bonds of kith and kin among these people were overlaid by a common religious identity, and it would seem that many were Baptists, or at least sympathetic to the Baptist position (McColl 1979: 14–17, 23-6, 37-42). The report of 1831 indicates that emigrants to Ontario maintained communication with those who remained at home, and encouraged them to join them. It affirms that Dugald Sinclair was eventually persuaded to emigrate by the requests of earlier emigrants for his services as pastor, and by an impending exodus from his church. In short, there were powerful 'pull' factors which influenced his decision.

The report of 1831 does, however, indicate that the 'prospects of usefulness' for missionary work at Lochgilphead had declined by this date. In his letter to the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland, Sinclair made it clear that the timing of his decision to emigrate was determined by the apparent lack of success in his own ministry:

> While the Lord seemed to smile upon my labours at home, I feared that to take such a step would seem like proceeding directly against the plain intimations of God's will, in regard to the sphere in which he would have me to labour; the solicitations of my friends to go and take the oversight of them in America were therefore waived. Now, however, when he has been pleased to withhold any success for so long a time, and their requests still continuing, a new turn is given to my mind; so that at present it seems to me an intimation of his will that I should go (BHMS Report 1831: 6-7).

The first indications of Sinclair's unease with his work at Lochgilphead are found in his 1828-9 dispatch to the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland. 'The audience,' he reported, 'is considerably diminished, in consequence of a Government church being lately opened in the neighbourhood . . . Besides, a spirit of slumber evidently pervades our church' (BHMS Report 1829: 33). The provision of this new church in Lochgilphead adversely affected the Baptist congregation, and this indicates very clearly that lack of an alternative church, rather than sympathy towards Baptist principles, had helped to swell the original Baptist following. The 'slumber' which Sinclair discerned in the church may have been caused by despondency among the remaining members as their numbers were reduced by defection to a rival congregation. It is also possible that Sinclair's preaching was becoming less acceptable than it had previously been.

The content of Sinclair's preaching and the nature of his beliefs may, indeed, have changed to some extent in the years immediately preceding 1831. Such evidence as exists to sustain this view is found mainly in an account of the Lochgilphead church which appeared in a history of Scottish Baptists published in 1926. This account was evidently written by a member of the church, and probably draws much of its material from oral tradition. Sinclair's ministry and his final years at Lochgilphead are described as follows:

> Mr Sinclair's ministry was very fruitful, and spread far beyond Lochgilphead, as far as Islay, Mull, and the other islands of the West. There was a mysterious persuasiveness about him which arrested the people, and a winsomeness that bound them to him by the strongest tie. Unfortunately in his later years he imbibed peculiar views on prophecy, the man of sin, and successive forms of the great tribulation. He believed that Europe was to be involved in a universal war, with Britain as its centre. America was to be excepted, and it was there that the Church of Christ was to be preserved till His return. Having such firm convictions, he prepared to emigrate, and such was his influence throughout the district that about 70 members with their families accompanied him to what they regarded as the promised land. The Church, of course, was greatly weakened, and when Rev. John Macintosh [*sic*] undertook the pastorate he found a greatly reduced and discouraged people. Nevertheless he pursued his course for 37 years, and the savour of his ministry still continues (Yuille 1926: 117).

The earlier contemporary evidence makes no reference to any change in Sinclair's beliefs, or to any link between his beliefs and his decision to emigrate. In the 1926 account, on the other hand, his beliefs are regarded as the crucial factor, and the wider context of emigration and social change is not mentioned. Sinclair, according to the 1926 account, was responsible for the emigration of a substantial number from the church. This number is put at 70, which is in conflict with the evidence of the 1831 BHMS Report, although it is possible that it includes both members and adherents of the church. According to the tradition of Middlesex County, Ontario, Sinclair was believed to have been accompanied by 60 'members' of the Lochgilphead church (McColl 1979: 17).

To what extent can the 1926 account be trusted in its claims about, and portrayal of, Sinclair's allegedly 'peculiar views'? It is undoubtedly true that, at least by 1850, Sinclair had abandoned what would now be regarded as an 'orthodox' Baptist position, and that he had affiliated himself, as we shall see, to the Disciples of Christ, who had come to be influential in south-western Ontario. Alexander Campbell, the principal leader of the Disciples' movement, was fascinated by the interpretation of Biblical prophecy and the apocalyptic symbolism of the Book of Daniel. He also had a sense of impending cataclysm, which he expressed in 1831 in his journal *The Millennial Harbinger*, as well as an optimistic view of the future of the American nation (Sandeen 1970: 45-6). A paradox of this kind appears to be reflected in the Lochgilphead account, and it is certainly possible that Sinclair could have been reading Campbell's publications before 1831. Yet, while the 1926 account appears to encapsulate a vague general outline of Campbell's teachings, it could merely be an uncritical 'reading back' of the position which Sinclair was believed to have assumed in Canada in later years.

The Disciples of Christ were not, of course, unique in their millennial interest. Such a concern was very common among other religious bodies in this period, especially in the United States (Sandeen 1970: 42-3), and it was fuelled by apocalyptic conceptions of emigration, which were shared by numerous ethnic groups (Meek 1988d). The belief that the 'Church of Christ' was to be preserved in America alone until the time of His return could be accommodated within the tenets of several religious bodies in the New World, including the Church of Christ of the Latter-day Saints, otherwise known as Mormons

(Marty 1985: 201-2), and it is possible that this body has been confused with the Disciples in the 1926 account. On the other hand, it is conceivable that, in his latter years at Lochgilphead, Sinclair's alleged interest in scriptural prophecy and its fulfilment developed as part of a wider British movement. A particular fascination with the imminence of Christ's return had developed in influential theological circles in Britain by the late 1820s, and figures such as J. N. Darby and Edward Irving were promoting a premillennial understanding of the Second Coming (Sandeen 1970: 3-42). The reference in the Lochgilphead account to Sinclair's interest in 'the man of sin' and 'the great tribulation' could suggest merely that he may have been influenced by millenarian speculation of the Darbyite (Brethren) type.

If we are to accept that the 1926 account has some validity, we must also recognise that it is not entirely sympathetic to Sinclair. His personal influence is heavily stressed, and this alone is seen as the reason for the depletion of the Lochgilphead church. The contemporary evidence substantially redresses the balance, and underlines the powerful social factors which influenced his decision. Emigration involving the previous Bellanoch pastor had taken place by 1814, and Sinclair to a certain extent repeated the pattern of his predecessor.

The possibility remains, however, that Sinclair's ministry, for one reason or another, had changed direction by the late 1820s, and that this was one of several factors leading to the decline of his congregation. It is probably significant that the arrival of John Mackintosh in Lochgilphead immediately marked the beginning of better days. By 1832 the membership of the church had risen from thirteen to twenty-one, and by 1833 Mackintosh was able to report that 'there is new life infused into the church' (BHMS Reports 1832: 13-14; 1833: 15).

## Dugald Sinclair, Disciple of Christ

Dugald Sinclair and his accompanying band of emigrants appear to have taken ship directly from Crinan to Canada. The vessel on which they sailed was probably the brig *Deveron,* which left Glasgow on 4 July 1831 and later called at Crinan. With a total of 302 passengers, the ship sailed from Crinan on 13 July, and arrived in Quebec on 27 August 1831. From Quebec the emigrants proceeded to south-western Ontario (Burley 1963: 13-14).

Sinclair and his family soon found their way to Lobo Township, Middlesex County, where, as we have seen, a significant number of emigrants from Knapdale and Lochgilphead had already settled. Initially Sinclair and his family stayed with John Sinclair, who had emigrated to Lobo with his brother Alexander in 1820, and who was probably a close relative (Butchart 1949: 393-4; McColl 1979: 38). Several of the band who emigrated with Sinclair also settled in Lobo, where they became members of the Scottish Baptist congregation which met there, and which had received occasional ministry from the former pastor of Bellanoch, Donald McVicar, until Sinclair's arrival. Some of Sinclair's band settled elsewhere in Ontario, doubtless depending on where they could obtain land.

Thus, Archibald McLarty, originally from Castletown on the Shirvan estate to the south of Lochgilphead, took up residence in Howard Township in Kent County (Burley 1963: 14-15).

As soon as he came to Lobo, Sinclair assumed the role of pastor of the Lobo congregation, and took steps to 'set it in order' as a constituted church. The available evidence indicates that the church was constituted along Scottish Baptist lines, and there is little indication that he was anything other than a Scottish Baptist at this point. Indeed, he was known for his initially strict adherence to Scottish Baptist principles, and there were aspects of his new church which did not meet with his immediate approval. In later years, Sinclair was remembered as 'a stern man, unflinching in his loyalty to what he believed to be truth. In catechising those applying for membership he was strict to the point of refusal at times' (Butchart 1949: 394). This statement may shed some light on the troubles which appear to have surfaced latterly at Lochgilphead, since it suggests that Sinclair had become inclined to exclusivism, accepting into his church only those who saw eye-to-eye with himself.

The emigrant situation gave Sinclair the opportunity to develop his talents as a supervising pastor, probably to a degree that would not have been possible even in the Highlands. As an ordained minister in an area which had an acute scarcity of ministers, he was able to exert considerable influence on the development of the several small, Gaelic-speaking congregations of Scottish Baptists in south-western Ontario. In a manner very similar to his methods in Scotland, he travelled regularly on a circuit which included the churches meeting in Mosa Township in Middlesex County, Howard Township in Kent County, and Aldborough Township in Elgin County. (See Figure 3.) Such was his importance that the churches under his care were known for some time as 'Sinclair-Baptist' churches, until they dropped their Baptist label and affiliated themselves to the Disciples of Christ. From then until his death in 1870, Sinclair served the churches as an Elder (in effect, pastor), preaching in English and Gaelic, and guiding their course with a firm hand.

The Scottish Baptist churches on Sinclair's circuit appear to have identified themselves with the name of the Disciples of Christ about 1850, or a little later (Butchart 1949: 394-5). Some of the Ontario churches, however, may have developed about twenty years earlier to a point where their polity and theology were similar to that of the Disciples. For Sinclair and the churches, the transition from the Scottish Baptist position to that of the Disciples appears to have been a gradual process. In making this transition, Sinclair is said to have been influenced initially by James Black, a native of Kilmartin, Argyll, whom he baptised at Bellanoch in 1817. Black, who was a schoolmaster, emigrated to Ontario in 1820, the chief reason for his emigration allegedly being his unwillingness to subscribe to the articles of belief of the body which maintained his school. Having allied himself at first with the Scottish Baptists who met in Aldborough Township, he began to baptise candidates in the absence of an ordained Baptist missionary, and gradually assumed a pastoral role (Butchart 1949: 403-4). It is said in one source that Black was supplying

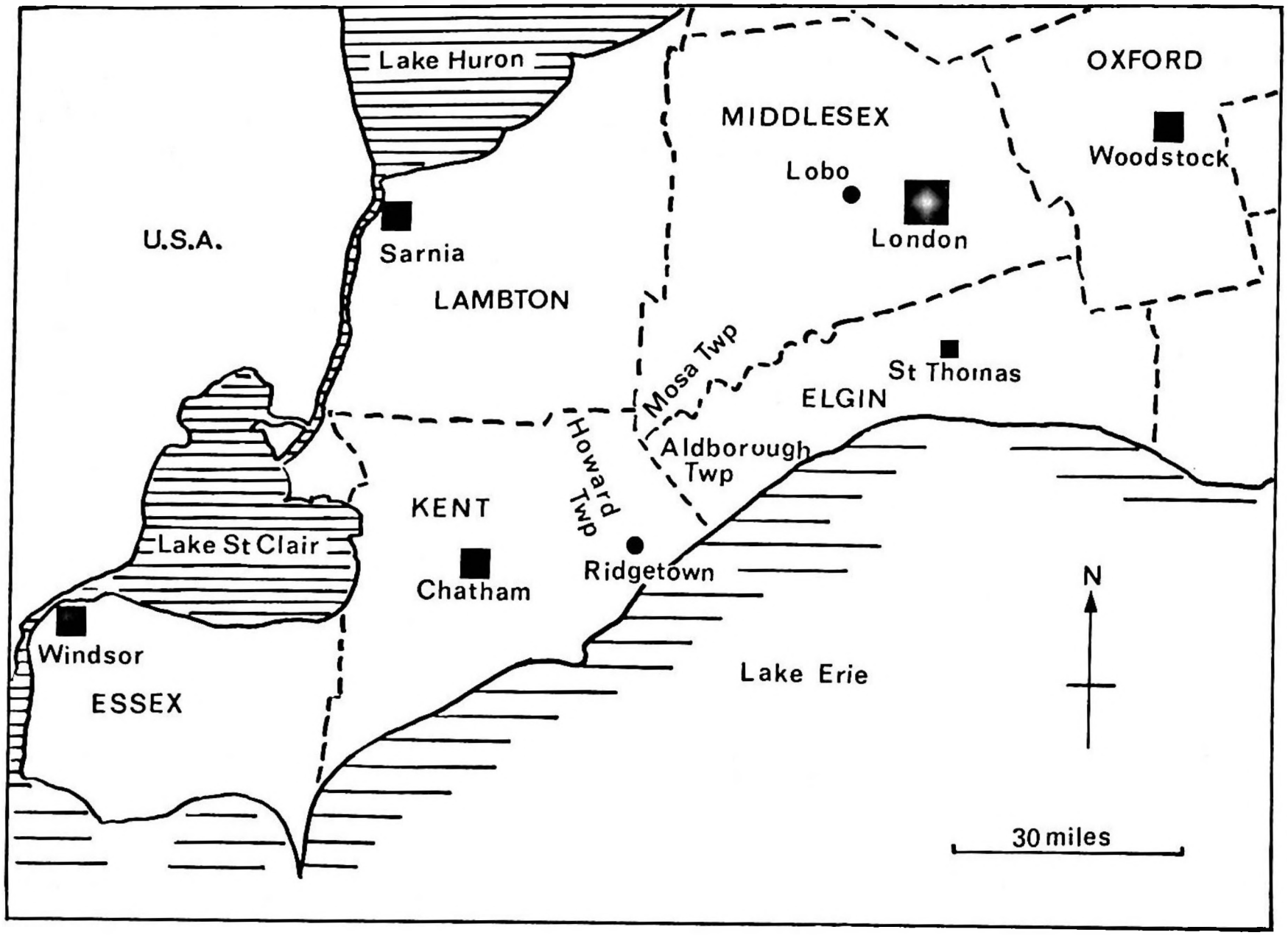


Fig. 3 South-western Ontario.

Sinclair with the literature of the Disciples' movement while he (Sinclair) was still in Lochgilphead (Butchart 1933: 14). In later years both Sinclair and Black earned a place as two of the six 'Pioneer Preachers' of the Disciples of Christ in Ontario (Butchart 1942: 11). Indeed, it is a fascinating aspect of the history of the Canadian branch of the Disciples that their movement owes much to Scottish Baptist emigrants from Argyll, and particularly to influential leaders from the Glassary, Knapdale and Lochgilphead districts.

In affiliating themselves to the Disciples of Christ, the Scottish Baptist churches of south-western Ontario joined a much wider movement which was particularly strong in the United States. This movement shared much common ground with that which had produced Baptist churches in the Highlands, but it was also different in several significant ways. For one thing, the Disciples were 'baptists', but they affirmed that baptism by immersion was essential for the forgiveness of sins. 'Orthodox' Baptists would have regarded baptism as a symbolic outward sign of an earlier experience of forgiveness. Like the Highland Baptist churches too, the Disciples sought to make the Scriptures the sole guide to church polity and practice, and they renounced the use of creeds and the formulation of subordinate standards. In matters of theology, however, they were opposed to Calvinism, and rejected the Philadelphia Confession of Faith, which was Particular Baptist (and thus Calvinist) in emphasis, and which was followed by many Baptist churches in North America. They maintained that a statement of belief, accompanied by baptism, was the only necessary basis and proof of salvation (Butchart 1949: 26-7).

The theological tenets of the Disciples of Christ were formulated by their principal leader, Alexander Campbell, an Irishman who had studied in Glasgow in 1808, and who had been influenced by Greville Ewing and the Haldane brothers, before he emigrated to the United States. His father, Thomas, had preceded him to the United States, where he served for some time as a minister of the Secession Church. After a stormy career with this denomination, he became a Baptist in 1812 at the same time as his son, Alexander. Father and son then launched out to lay the foundation of what later became the Disciples of Christ (Butchart 1949: 7-21; Thompson 1980: 13-20). The movement thus drew to itself a number of different strands of theology and church polity, but it retained a strong distinctiveness, especially through its understanding of baptism.

Yet in spite of such distinctiveness, the movement as a whole was, in broad terms, remarkably similar to that which had gripped certain parts of Scotland under the preaching of the Haldanes and related home missionary enterprises. It sought to restore the primitive New Testament model of the church, it was led by men with magnetic personalities and considerable intellectual gifts, it was characterised by revivals and a strong evangelical zeal, and it encouraged the founding and development of autonomous churches which, like the Baptist churches of Scotland, could assert their individual identities (McMillon 1983: 69-94). In Scotland itself after 1830, the Disciples influenced the development of several of the earlier Scotch Baptist churches, and their principles appealed to those who had a more rationalistic view of the evangelical faith (Murray 1984: 53-6). It is possible that for Dugald Sinclair, who possessed noticeable intellectual talents,

the intellectual brilliance of Alexander Campbell had a strong, if not overwhelming, attraction.[3]

When Dugald Sinclair and his fellow Baptists from Scotland identified themselves with the Disciples' movement, they had reached a significant stage in their religious development and national consciousness. Already they had moved from being Scottish Baptists to being 'Sinclair-Baptists'. By implementing a desire to belong to a body which was associated primarily with the New World, they made the final transition to another cultural context. As Scottish Baptists, they had contributed significantly to the emergence of a new movement in their homeland, and by absorbing the religious impulses from the United States of America, they were to make a similar contribution to the development of religious life in Canada.

## Conclusion

A close study of the life of Dugald Sinclair helps to illumine the development of Highland society in the nineteenth century, especially with regard to religious experience. It provides a picture of the growth and consolidation of religious dissent in the West Highlands in the period from 1800 to 1830, and it underlines the importance of a single individual in contributing to a religious movement of this kind. Although Sinclair did not become a leader of national significance, he was undoubtedly a leader of note within his own community and among the religious cells which he helped to establish.

Sinclair's life also demonstrates the close links which existed between social change and religious experience in this period. This can be seen particularly in the emigrant context and in Sinclair's role as a leader within an emigrant group bound together by common territorial origins, kinship and religious identity. Men like Sinclair exercised a profound effect on the development of such groups, and in the land of their adoption they led their people in their response to a new cultural and religious setting.

An examination of the circumstances attending Sinclair's emigration shows that, for him, the decision to emigrate was not easy, and that he made this decision in the light of several factors, weighed up over a period. The later (1926) Lochgilphead account of Sinclair indicates that the role of such men can be re-interpreted misleadingly in subsequent years, probably under the influence of preconceptions in vogue at the time. In assessing the place of Sinclair (and others of his kind) in history, there can be no substitute for the rigorous examination of the primary sources of historical evidence.

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## NOTES

1 See Note 2.

2 The three other men who studied at Bradford Academy with the support of the Lochgilphead Church in this period were John Paul, 1818-21, who moved to Boston, Lincolnshire, and then to Burslem; John McKaog, 1819-22, who went initially to Ireland as an itinerant with the Baptist Itinerant Society; and Archibald McPhail, 1822-3, whose studies were terminated before he completed his course. It is noteworthy that only John McMillan returned to a Highland station. Although Baptist enterprise in the Highlands could have benefited from many more itinerant preachers, the means to support them was probably insufficient in the period before the establishment of the Baptist Home Missionary Society for Scotland in 1827 (Northern Education Society Reports 1804-25). For the later career of John McKaog (otherwise McKaeg), see Manley and Petras 1981: 38-52.

3 The distinction between 'Scotch Baptists' and 'Scottish Baptists' is very important in this context. The Scotch Baptists, the older of the two main Scottish movements, whose churches were led by a plurality of elders, owed much to the work and writings of John Glas and Robert Sandeman. So, too, did the Disciples of Christ, and for this reason they shared common ground which made it easier for some Scotch Baptist churches to embrace the teachings of the Disciples. The term 'Scottish Baptists', which is comprehensive, includes the so-called 'English' Baptists, whose churches were led by a single pastor and deacons. Dugald Sinclair, like Christopher Anderson and George Barclay, belonged to this latter group.

It is therefore all the more fascinating that Sinclair was subsequently attracted to the Disciples. While the influence of the Disciples on Scotch Baptists has been recognised, their possible influence on the 'English' Baptists in Scotland has received less acknowledgement (McMillon 1983; Murray 1984).

## APPENDIX

### The Family of Dugald Sinclair

Glassary OPR shows that the main concentration of Sinclair families in the parish was in the area from Kilmichael Glassary to Glasvar, the district with which Dugald Sinclair claims closest connection. Three families merit attention:

(1) Archibald Sinclair and Katrina MacKellar, resident at Glasvar. Children: Archibald, 31 July 1771; Elizabeth, 2 June 1776.
(2) John Sinclair and Christian MacKellar, resident at Kilmichael (1772), Ballimore (1785) and the Mill, Uila (1789). Children: Catherine, 9 February 1772; Donald, 3 August 1785; Duncan, 4 April 1789.
(3) Duncan Sinclair and Anne McFadyen, resident at Ballimore (1774) and Uila (1785). Children: Peter, 3 September 1774; Duncan, 26 December 1785; Mary, 20 February 1788; Colin, 17 May 1790; Archibald, 10 June 1792; Colin, 1 November 1794.

Since Dugald Sinclair had a brother, Donald, who died on 3 March 1868, aged eighty-two years and nine months (Males 1985), the evidence points to the possibility that John Sinclair and Christian MacKellar (family (2)) may have been the parents of Dugald Sinclair, and it may be significant that Dugald named his second son John (see below). It is likely that there was a close relationship between family (2) and family (1) above. Two brothers may have been married to two sisters. That the first two families were also related to the third family is suggested by the names of Dugald Sinclair's children, which include Archibald and Colin.

The family gravestones at Lobo (Males 1985) record an Elizabeth Sinclair, who died on 16 August 1890, aged 90 years. She was Dugald Sinclair's sister-in-law (Campbell 1917: 40).

Dugald and Christina Sinclair had six sons and two daughters. The names of three sons are recorded on the family gravestones: Malcolm, who died on 13 August 1845, probably in infancy; Duncan, who died on 11 March 1861, aged 20 years, seven months and 21 days; and Dugald, who died on 12 May 1892, aged 66, and who is known to have been a preacher with the Disciples (Lister 1892). Archibald (aged 14 in 1852) and Colin (aged 18 in 1852) are on record in the Lobo township Census of 1851-2. Both were prominent in the Lobo church, and Colin became the pastor of the Disciples' church at Ridgetown, Howard Township, Kent County (Butchart 1949: 394-6). The Sinclairs' second son was John, aged 23 in 1852 (Lobo Census 1851-2). The two daughters were Maria D. (probably

representing 'Donalda'), aged 24 in 1852, and Mary Ann, aged 16 in 1852 (Lobo Censuses, 1851-2, 1861-2).

In 1851-2 the Sinclair family lived in a two-storey frame house on Lot 3, Concession 8, in Lobo Township. The lot comprised 200 acres, of which 50 were under cultivation, and 150 under wood or wild (*ibid.*).

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