Bleith Sailoiniga (The Salonika Milling)

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On Monday, 8 April 1968 I met the boat at Lochboisdale and welcomed Eric Cregeen to his first fieldwork visit to the Uists. During the following few days he was able to meet a number of distinguished informants whose contributions on this and subsequent visits remained as highlights in his memory for the rest of his life: men like John MacDonald, Kyles Paible and Donald Ewen MacDonald, Balranald, both of North Uist, Donald Alick MacEachen of Aird, Benbecula, and Lachlan MacLeod of Ardnastruban, Grimsay.

Another principal attraction to the Uists for Eric had been the prospect of meeting Peter Morrison of Sandbank, Grimsay. I had been recording Peter extensively since 1962 and was in process of preparing a book of his stories and songs for publication.[1] Eric was especially anxious to meet him as he was the only man known to either of us who had maintained a hand-quern or *brà* in full working order and had indeed used it.

After being thwarted by the state of the tide in our first attempt to reach Sandbank on Wednesday, I had the satisfaction of bringing Eric and Peter together there on the following day, Thursday 11 April 1968. Peter demonstrated the working of the quern to us and Eric took photographs, including the one printed here.[2]

The text which I now offer in memory of both of them had been recorded by myself from Peter at Sandbank eighteen months before, on 17 October 1966, his 77th birthday.[3] We had been discussing the use of the quern in Grimsay within his own memory. He volunteered the information that he himself had used it and offered the following account as a story. It was recorded as an uninterrupted performance.[4] The result is not only an interesting exercise in oral history but also a striking piece of oral narrative. It is a remarkable account of inherited traditional skills being deployed to good effect at the diagonally opposite end of Europe by a Hebridean crofter-fisherman during the First World War. Eric Cregeen was fascinated by it.[5]

Bleith Sailoiniga

Bha mi dol a dh'innse dhan chomann[6] a seo mu dheidhinn bleith le brà ann a Sailoiniga. San àm an deach a' reisimeid againne a Sailoiniga an dèidh a bhith aona mìos deug san Eiphèit,[7] bha 'n t-acras oirnn — airson a chur aithghearr — agus cha robh e mar iongnadh. 'S e cairtean mòra cugallach fiodha air an tarrainn le daimh a bha toir suas a' bhiadh againn a Port Sailoiniga gu na loidhneadh agus bha nàmhaid a bha sinn nan aghaidh — na *Bulgarians* — bha iad air beanntan àrd far a faiceadh iad a' rathad, a' chuid mhòr dhen rathad sìos gu Sailoiniga. Bhiodh iad ag obair air a sin le na gunnaichean mòra gus gu milleadh iad a' rathad coiseadh[8] againn 's a chuile sìon a bhiomaid a' toir air. Bha seo a' cur maill mhòr uaireannan sna daimh agus nuair a ruigeadh an t-aran sinne, bhiodh e air a phrannadh agus bhiodh e gann. Chunna mi sinn a' cur crann nuair a readh dà cheann lof a chur còmhladh agus crùgan beag de bhriosgaidean cruaidhe mu mheudachd bonn-a-sia, agus 's e fiacaill mhath a dhèanadh dà leth orra. Bhiomaid a' cur crann air a' lof, 's dòcha gum biodh aon duine deug no dei'near no dusan san t-*section* agus cha bu mhòr cuid an t-aon dhe 's bha sprùilleach a bhiodh am màs a' phoca ri torradan beag a dhèanamh dhe mu choinneamh a chuile torradan eile bh'ann. Gabh a-nis a' rud a bheir an crann dhut.

Latha dhe na bha sinn a' dol mu chuairt ann a sheo, ann a' *village*[9] a bh'ann — *Verik*[10]: bha na h-urad de dh'àthannan 's de stàblaichean 's de bhàthchannan ann, agus cisteachan mòra — chanadh na seann daoine sa Ghàidhealtachd giornaileir riutha, ach 's ann air an dèanamh air seòrsa de chuilc a bha iad siud agus lìnigeadh creadha riutha nam broinn, ach bha iad làn gum beul le grân brèagha glan cruaidh.[11] Dol mu chuairt mu na bàthchannan 's a coimhead air an dèanamh a bh'orra 's a chuile sìon mun deidhinn bha e na chur seachad ùine dhuinn uaireannan agus thug mise an aire gu robh brà no dhà aig a chuile taigh. Thuirt mi ri fear dhe na gillean a mhuinntir a' Chinn a Tuath[12] — cha bheò an diugh e; 's ann a mhuinntir Hoghagearraidh a bha e — thuirt mi ris: 'Nach bochd dhuinn, a Ruairidh,[13] an t-acras a bhith oirnn agus na bheil a seo de bhiadh?'

'An ann,' as esan, 'a' dol a dhèanamh cleas nan cearc a tha thu,' as esan, 'an grân ithe?'

'Chan ann, a Ruairidh,' asa mise, 'ach 's ann a tha mi dol a dhèanamh brochan is aran air.'

'Ciamar a nì thu e?' as esan.

'A,' asa mise, 'bheil thu fhèin an aois a tha thu agus nach do rinn thu min eòrna riamh le brà?'

'O chunna mi bhrà ag obair,' as esan, 'ach chan urrainn dhomh ràdh,' as esan, 'gun do chuir mi mu chuairt riamh i.'

'*Uel*, ma-thà,' asa mise, 'cha b'e sin dhòmhs' e. Bhithinn-sa ga cur mu chuairt,' asa mise, 'agus bhithinn glè riaraichte ris a' chosnadh cuideachd agus ag èisdeachd Clann Chaluim Big[14] a b'aithne dhut,' asa mise. B'aithne dhan a' ghille an t-eilean gu math — Ruairidh Thormaid 'ic Ruairidh[13] an t-Hoghagearraidh a bh'ann. Agus 's e *section* Gàidhealach a bh'agam uileag.

'*Uel*, a Ruairidh, tha mise dol a dhèanamh suas brà agus tha mi dol a bhleith.'

'O ma-thà,' asa Ruairidh, 'bidh mise leat, a chuile cuideachadh is urra dhomh dhèanamh, ach chan aithne dhomh sìon mu dheidhinn.'

'Ceart gu leòr. Fhalbh 's faigh greim air duine no dithis eile,' asa mise, 'agus feuch a faigh sibh greim air pèilichean no soitheach air choireigin a ni feum dhuinn, agus ged a bhiodh tuill orra bheir a-staigh dhan a' *hut* againn fhìn iad, a Ruairidh.'

Rinn e seo. *Uel*, a' chiad chuideachadh a fhuair e, agus 's e bh'air a dhòigh, 's e fear ris an canadh iad Seonaidh a' Ghranndaich. 'S e Granndach Bhàlaigh[15] a chanadh iad ri athair a' ghille sin. Bha fear eile ann a mhuinntir Bheinne-Fadhla, Uilleam Mac Aonghais.[16] Bha mòran Ghàidheil eile ann, Tuathaich is Deasaich,[12] a' deanamh suas an t-*section* agus bha *squadron* againn uileag sìos ann an àthannan 's am bàthchannan 's air fad an àite bh'ann a sheo. Agus bha na Dàrna Camshronaich, bha iad air an dèanamh suas air a chuile seòrsa bh'ann an uairsin, 's iad a bha air a' laimh thoisgeil dhinn.

Cha robh sgonnan 's cha robh sùil sa bhrà, 's cha robh brod innte, ach bha fiodh gu leòr air na taighean a bh'ann. Cha robh mise fada deanamh sgonnan is sùil is brod do bhrà mhòr a bh'ann 's fhuaireadh air dòigh i 's thug mi an airc gu robh i air a deagh bhreacadh.[17] Bha feadhainn bheag is mhòr ann, caochladh meudachd unnta.

Thainig càch agus aon leth-dusan aca de phèilichean dhe gach seòrs agus a chuile gin riamh dhiubh làn tholl. Thuirt Ruairidh — 's e bha deanamh eadar-theangair[18] — thuirt e:

'Cha chumadh iad seo na clacha beaga dhut gun tighinn air uisge.'

'A, ma-thà, a Ruairidh, tha mi creidsinn gu bheil linigeadh ri seann seacaid no pòcaid ri briogais. Stiall as iad agus seallaidh mise dhut mar a chumas na pèilichean an t-uisge.'

Chaidh luideag a chur sa chuile toll a bh'ann, sa mhàs 's as na cliathaichean, gus a robh e àrd gu leòr suas airson na bha dhìth oirnn de bhrochan a dhèanamh.

Chuireadh an uairsin ann a soitheach eile dhiubh cuid mhath gràin — bhiodh lìpinn[19] no dhà ann co-dhiùbh — 's theannadh air a chruadhachadh air an teine 's ga chur mu chuairt le pios maide mar a bhithinn a' faicinn Clann Chaluim[14] a' dèanamh.

Agus bha feadhainn a bharrachd air Clann Chaluim: bha feadhainn eile — Gilleasa Mac Ruairidh[20] a chanadh iad ri fear a bh'ann: bhiodh esan an còmhnaidh a' bleith. Cha robh cruit idir aige ach bha e faighinn àiteach gu leòr a dhèanamh 's pìos math eòrna ann a mathachadh a' bhuntàta chuile bliadhna 's bhiodh e dol dhan mhuileann 's a chuile sìon. Bha brà mhòr mhòr a-staigh aig an duine sin. Bha brà sa chuile taigh a bh'ann an uairsin.

Thòisicheadh air cruadhachadh a' ghràin 's nuair a bha e cruaidh gu leòr, cha robh ach a' bhrà fhaighinn air dòigh agus dh'fheum-te sùil a dhèanamh a rachadh air uachdar a' bhrod. Agus 's e 'n t-sùil a bhithinn-sa faicinn — na seann daoine nuair a bhiodh iad a' dol a bhleith — sop connlaich 's bha iad a' dèanamh fàinne dhe timcheall air a meòir 's a' toir a-staigh a' chinn mu dheireadh grunn thursan thromh 'n rud, 's bha seo a' ceangal an fhàinne 's bha iad ga chur air a' bhrathainn 's ga dinneadh sìos agus, ma bha e ro mhòr, ghabhadh iad sop bu chaoile gus gu faigheadh iad gum biodh e cho grinn — an grinneas sa mhin a bha dhìth orra 's a bha freagarrach, 's ann a rèir seo a bha fainne bh'air a' bhrà.[17]

Cha robh againn ach ùrlar bog puill 's cha robh fhios ciamar a readh a' bhrà a chur sìos airson a' mhin a chumail glan. Cha robh duine againn a readh a chur plangaid foidhpe: cha robh iad glan gu leòr. Cha robh iad glan gu leòr airson cadal unnta gun tighinn air a dhol a chur biadh orra. Agus thuirt Seonaidh a' Ghranndaich:

'Bheir mise dhuibh pàipear naidheachd,' as esan.

Bha *Oban Times* aige bha aon trì mìosan a dh'aois agus bha e ga ghleidheadh airson a bhith ga leughadh 's ga leughadh 's ga leughadh 's a' toir leughadh dhe do dhuine mu seach 's bha e ga phasgadh seachad gu cùramach an dèidh sin. *Uel*, feumaidh gu robh e saoilsinn torr dhen a' mhathas a bha dol a thighinn on bhrà nuair a thug e dhuinne an t-*Oban Times*. Sgaoileadh a-mach e as a bhroinn 's chuireadh a' bhrà na suidhe air a mhuin.

Thòisich sinn air bleith, mi-fhìn agus Ruairidh an toiseach. Bha nuair sin càch na seasamh ag iarraidh poile mu seach. Fhuair iad sin. Nuair a bha bhleith a' dol air adhart, bha bìdeag bheag de thaigh air a thogail na b'àirde na stàbla as a robh sinne, agus bha na *signallers* ann — Seonaidh a' Ghobha, bràthair Dhòmhnaill a tha 'm *Post Office* Chàirinis, e fhèin 's a mhac gun a' latha 'n diugh,[21] agus an caiptin — a' *squadron* againn fhìn — *Captain Coles* a Sròn an t-Sìdhein. Bha iad a dol seachad air an doras againn 's chuala *Captain Coles* fuaim na brà, 's dh'fhaighneachd e do Sheonaidh:

'*What noise is that, MacLean*?' as esan.

'*They're grinding meal, Sir.*'

'*They're what*?' as esan.

'*Grinding meal, Sir.*'

'*Oh, I'd like to see that,*' as esan. '*How is it done*?'

Dh'innis Seonaidh dha 's choisich iad a-staigh, agus an ath rud a chuala sinne 's e *Coles* crom os ar cionn a' faighneachd:

'*What are you going to do with the meal, boys*?'

Sheall mise suas os mo chionn 's bha *Captain Coles* os mo chionn agus:

'*Porridge first of all, Sir, and then we'll try and bake it into scones.*'

'*You know how to do it?*' as esan.

'*Yes Sir,*' asa mise. '*I learned that when I was very young.*'

'*All right,*' as esan. '*Let me have a sample*', as esan, '*when it's finished.*'

'*All right, Sir, I'll do that.*'

Rinneadh brochan — lipinn[19] math brochain. 'S ann a thàinig a chuile duine riamh 's chuireadh sìos a *mhess-tin* air an ùrlar 's chuireadh mu chuairt ann a shin gus an do ruitheadh air. Chaidh mise suas, ann a' *lid mess-tin* an airm, gu *Captain Coles* le *sample* dhen brochan 's dh'fheuch e e 's dh'ith e e, 's thuirt e gu robh e:

'*Very nourishing indeed, Morrison,*' as esan. '*Keep on,*' as esan. '*Produce more.*'

Fhuair mise nuair sin, agus duine no dithis eile, ceud tuilleadh dhen ghràn a chruadhachadh agus a bhith deanamh min.

Bha nuair sin, far a robh sinn, san àite bheag a bh'ann a sheo, bha muileann ann — muileann Gearmailteach. 'S ann air obrachadh le *steam* a bha e agus, sa *furnace* aige, 's e fiodh a bha dol ann. Bha coilltean a-mach bhuainn. Bha muileann air a chur as a chèile 's air a chaith air feadh an talmhanna na phàirtean. 'S ann a thionndaidh *Coles* le partaidh a' lorg mu chuairt. Fhuair iad a chuile *bit* a bhuineadh dha. Bha gille eil' ann a mhuinntir Sròn an t-Sìdhein, *Roddy Munro*, agus bha e bliadhna no dha a-staigh ag ionnsachadh *mechanical engineer.* 'S e *engineer* a bh'ann an *Coles* e fhèin — *Captain Coles* — nuair a bha e òg. Theann e fhèin 's Ruairidh air a' mhuileann. Chuir iad a' mhuileann a dh-obair. Theann an uair sin *fatigue party* a' dol a-mach a chruinneachadh fiodh agus feadhainn eile toir a-null gràin agus ghoid mise agus feadhainn eile a camp a bh'air falbh bhuainn siota mòr iarainn. Cha robh claisean idir ann. Bha e còmhnard o thaobh gu taobh, de shiota dubh. 'S ann air a sin a bhathar ga luasgadh air ais 's air adhart, a' cruadhachadh a' ghràin, agus theann a' muileann air bleith.

Thugadh bhuapa mise nuair sin do *bhattery — trench mortar battery.* Chaidh mi thromh *chourse* ann a *Sitoun* san Eipheit air a shon agus thàinig mi as le *high marks.* Bha *attack* a' tighinn dheth air baile mòr a bha mur coinneamh aig na *Bulgarians* ris an canadh iad *Sirus.*[22] Bha drochaid ri dhol air an abhainn 's a chuile sìon, ach thachair sin mar a thachair è,'s chaill sinn mòran dhe na gillean Gàidhealach ann cuideachd.

Ach, co-dhiù airson tighinn go co-dhùnadh na bleith, 's ann as a' bhrà a thàinig gun deach an t-*engine* a chur a' dol — a' muileann bleith. Agus latha dhe na lathaichean a chaidh mi sìos far a robh Ruairidh — bha òrdan agam fear dhe na gillean a chur sìos a dh'iarraidh min latha sa bith a bhiodh i dhith orm — thuirt mi ri Ruairidh:

'Nach bochd a Ruairidh nach b'aithne dhut drudhag uisge bheatha dhèanamh.'

'A, nach e bhiodh math,' asa Ruairidh.

Dh'innis mi dha na bha mi cluinnteil aig na bodaich o chionn fada mu dheidhinn dèanamh uisge bheatha. Thòisich Ruairidh air, ach cha robh na foidhidinn aige idir cho math 's a bha mi 'n dùil, ach bha e rådha gun do rinn e leann math. 'S dh'òl mise

deoch dhe cuideachd bhuaithe, latha dhe na lathaichean, ach bha e mar gum biodh an dàrna leth bainne ann.

Agus 's e rud a thàinig as: rinn mise sloc a-staigh an aghaidh na *trench* againn fhìn agus, *lid* an *dixie* mhòr a bh'againn, bha mi deanamh aran ann a shin — breacagan. Cha robh sòda no *cream-of-tartar* no rud eile dol, fiù an t-salainn, ach bha iad glè mhath. Bha mi gam pasgadh ann an clobhd glan agus bha iad a' tighinn air ais[23] ann mar gum biodh breacagan eòrna chithinn aig mo mhàthair 's as na taighean eile nuair a bha mi òg.

Ach lathaichean dhe na lathaichean cò thàinig a-staigh ach fear dhe na h-*officers* againn — Albannach a bh'ann — *Lieutenant Robertson.* Agus mus do bhrist an Cogadh a-mach, bha e na *mhember* sa *C.I.D.* Duine *smart.*

'*What are you doing Morrison*?' as esan.

'*Baking scones, Sir. The supply of bread is very very scarce.*'

'*I'm sure it is,*' as esan. '*We can say the same,*' as esan. Agus dh'fhaighneachd e robh iad math. Thuirt mi gu robh.

'*Would you like to try a scone, Sir? Take it to the mess with you.*'

'*I'd be delighted,*' as esan, '*and thank you.*'

Phaisg mi suas i ann am pìos de phàipear a bh'ann 's thug mi dha i. Ach nochd mo liagh a-màireach agus dh'fhaighneachd e spèurainn tèile. Thuirt mi gu spèuradh.

'*I made it into about a dozen parts last night, with the knife,*' as esan, '*and they all enjoyed it and asked me to try and get more.*'

'*Uel,* chùm e air tadhal agamsa agus bha mi toir dha ceathramh,[24] agus uaireannan a bheirinn dha barrachd air ceathramh a bheireadh e leis dhan *mhess.* Cha robh e na chall sa bith dhòmhsa: 's ioma *toast* math ruma thug e dhomh, agus bocsa tombaca, '*Rod and Gun.*'

Agus sin agaibh stòiridh bleith Sailoiniga.

Translation

I was going to tell the company[6] here about grinding with a quern in Salonika. When our regiment went to Salonika after being eleven months in Egypt,[7] we were hungry — to put it briefly — and that was no wonder. It was big ramshackle wooden carts, drawn by oxen, that brought our food up to the line from the Port of Salonika and the enemy who were facing us — the Bulgarians — they were on high hills from which they could see the road — most of the road — down to Salonika. They were pounding it with their big guns so as to damage our access[8] and everything we were bringing in on it. This sometimes delayed the oxen very badly and when the bread got to us it was all broken up and it was scarce. I've seen us drawing lots when two ends of a loaf were put together and a little handful of hard biscuits about the size of a ha'penny, and it took a good tooth to crack them. We were drawing lots for the loaf and there might be ten or eleven or twelve men in the section and one man's share of it didn't

amount to much, and the crumbs in the bottom of the bag had to be divided into little heaps to go with every other little heap. Now just take what the luck of the draw brings you.

One of these days when we were going around here, in a village[9] there, Verik[10]: there were lots of barns and stables and byres and big chests — the old folk in the Highlands used to call them girnels, but these were made of a sort of wicker, with a lining of clay to the insides of them, but they were full to the brim with fine, clean, hard grain.[11] Going around the byres and looking at how they were constructed and everything about them was a way of passing the time for us sometimes, and I noticed that there was a quern or two at every house. I said to one of the lads from North Uist[12] — he's not alive today; he was from Hougharry — I said to him:

'What a pity for us, Roderick,[13] to be going hungry and all this food here.'

'Are you,' he said, 'going to do what the hens do,' said he, 'are you going to eat the grain?'

'No, Roderick,' said I, 'but I'm going to make porridge and bread with it.'

'How can you do it?' said he.

'Ah,' said I, 'are you as old as you are and you've never made barley meal with a quern?'

'Oh, I've seen the quern working,' said he, 'but I can't say,' said he, 'that I ever turned it.'

'Well, then,' said I, 'I was quite different. I used to be turning it,' said I, 'and very happy to be doing it too, and listening to Wee Calum's folk,[14] whom you knew,' said I. The lad knew the island [Grimsay] well: Roderick son of Norman son of Roderick[15] in Hougharry he was. And my section was all Highlanders.

'Well, Roderick, I'm going to set up a quern and I'm going to start grinding.'

'Oh well then,' said Roderick, 'I'll be with you, with whatever help I can offer, but I don't know anything about it.'

'All right. Go and find one or two others,' said I, 'and see if you can get hold of pails or any kind of container that we can use and even if there are holes in them, bring them into our own hut, Roderick.'

He did this. Well, the first help he got, and very happy he was too, was a man they called John Grant. It was Grant of Vallay[15] they called that lad's father. There was another man from Benbecula, William MacInnes.[16] There were lots of other Highlanders, North Uist and South Uist men,[12] making up the section, and our whole squadron were down in barns and byres and all around this place. And the Second Camerons — they were made up of all sorts at that time — they were on our left flank.

There was no turning-handle and there was no *sùil* in the quern and there was no *brod* in it, but there was plenty of timber on the houses that were there. It didn't take me long to make a handle and a *sùil* and a *brod* for a big quern that was there. And we got it ready and I took care that it was well picked.[17] There were small ones and big ones there, all different sizes.

The others came in with about half a dozen pails of all sorts and every one of them full of holes. Roderick said — he was the one who was acting as go-between[18] — he said:

'This lot wouldn't hold pebbles for you, let alone water.'

'Ah well, Roderick, I'm sure there must be a lining to an old jacket or a pocket in a pair of trousers. Tear them out and I'll show you how to make the pails watertight.'

A bit of rag was pushed into every hole, in the bottoms and in the sides, till they were high enough to take as much porridge as we wanted to make.

Then a fair quantity of grain was put into another of these containers — there would be a lippy[19] or two at least — and we started to harden it over the fire, stirring it with a piece of stick as I used to see Calum's folk[14] doing. And there were others besides Calum's folk: there were others — Gilleasbuig son of Roderick[20] one of them was called. He was always grinding. He didn't have a croft at all, but he was still able to get enough land to cultivate and a good plot of barley in last year's potato ground every year and he went to the mill and everything. This man had a big, big quern at home. There was a quern in all the houses at that time.

We began to harden the grain and when it was hard enough, it was just a matter of getting the quern ready and you had to make a *sùil* that would go on top of the *brod.* And the *sùil* that I used to see — the old folk when they were starting to grind — a corn straw, and they would make it into a ring round their finger, bringing the last bit at the end in several times through the thing, and this held the ring together, and they would place it on the quern and push it down and, if it was too big they would take another thinner straw until they got it as fine — the fineness they wanted the meal to be and was suitable, that was the purpose of the ring on the quern.[17]

All we had was a soft muddy floor and we didn't know how the quern could be set down so that the meal would be kept clean. None of us would put a blanket under it; they weren't clean enough. They weren't clean enough to sleep in, let alone to put food on them. And John Grant said:

'I'll give you a newspaper,' said he.

He had an *Oban Times* that was about three months old and he kept it so that he could read it and read it and read it again and give a read of it to others, turn about, and he would fold it away carefully afterwards. Well, he must have thought a lot of the benefit that would come from the quern when he gave us the *Oban Times.* It was spread out and the quern was set down on top of it.

We began to grind, first Roderick and myself. Then the others were standing around waiting their turn. They got that. When the grinding was going on, there was a little bit of a house built higher than the stable that we were in, and the signallers were there — John son of the Smith, the brother of Donald who is in the Post Office at Carinish, his son and he, to this day[21] — and the captain of our Squadron, Captain Coles from Strontian. They were passing our door and Captain Coles heard the sound of the quern and he asked John:

'What noise is that, MacLean?' said he.

'They're grinding meal, Sir.'

'They're what?' he said.

'Grinding meal, Sir.'

'Oh, I'd like to see that,' said he. 'How is it done?'

John told him and they walked in and the next thing we heard was Coles bending over us asking:

'What are you going to do with the meal, boys?'

I looked up and Captain Coles was standing over me and:

'Porridge first of all, Sir, and then we'll try and bake it into scones.'

'You know how to do it?' said he.

'Yes, Sir,' said I. 'I learned that when I was very young.'

'All right,' said he. 'Let me have a sample,' said he, 'when it's finished.'

'All right, Sir, I'll do that.'

We made porridge — a good lippy[19] of porridge. Every man came and set down his mess-tin on the floor and it was shared around there until it was finished. I went up, with the lid of an army mess-tin to Captain Coles with a sample of the porridge and he tasted it and he ate it and he said it was:

'Very nourishing indeed, Morrison,' said he. 'Keep on,' said he. 'Produce more.'

Then I, and one or two others, got permission to harden more of the grain and to go on making meal.

Then, where we were, in this little place, there was a mill there — a German mill. It was operated by steam and, the furnace of it, it was wood that went into it. There were woods opposite us. The mill had been broken up and scattered in bits all over the fields. Coles turned out with a party to search all round. They found every bit that belonged to it. There was another lad from Strontian, Roddy Munro, and he had spent a year or two training to be a mechanical engineer. Coles was an engineer himself — Captain Coles — when he was young. He and Roddy got to work on the mill.

They got the mill going. Then a fatigue party began to go out collecting wood and others bringing grain over, and I myself and some others stole a big sheet of iron from a camp some distance away. There were no corrugations in it. It was smooth from side to side: a black sheet. This was placed on top of the boiler, over the heat. It was on that we shovelled it back and forth, hardening the grain, and the mill started to grind.

I was taken away from them then to a battery — a trench-mortar battery. I had gone through a course in Sitoun in Egypt for it and I came out with high marks. There was an attack coming off on a big town opposite us held by the Bulgarians that was called Séres.[22] The river had to be bridged and everything, but that turned out as it did, and we lost a lot of the Highland lads there too.

But anyway, to come to the conclusion of the milling: it was the quern that led to the engine getting started and the mill grinding. And one of these days when I went down to see Roddy — I had orders to send one of the lads down for meal any day I wanted it — I said to Roddy:

'What a pity, Roddy, that you don't know how to make a drop of whisky.'

'Ah, wouldn't that be good!' said Roddy.

I told him all I had been hearing from the old fellows long ago about making whisky. Roddy started to try it, but he didn't have as much patience as I thought he would, but he told me he had made good beer. And I got a drink of it from him too, one of these days, but it was as if it were half milk.

And the end of the matter was that I dug a hole into the face of our own trench and, in the lid of the big dixie we had, I was making bread there — bannocks. There was no soda or cream-of-tartar or anything else to be got, not even salt, but they were quite good. I was wrapping them in a clean cloth and they were coming back[23] in it like the barley bannocks that I used to see my mother with and in the other houses when I was young.

But one of these days who should come in but one of our officers — a Scot he was — Lieutenant Robertson. And before the war broke out he was a member of the C.I.D. A smart man.

'What are you doing, Morrison?' he asked.

'Baking scones, Sir. The supply of bread is very very scarce.'

'I'm sure it is,' said he. 'We can say the same,' said he.

And he asked if they were good. I said they were.

'Would you like to try a scone, Sir? Take it to the mess with you.'

'I'd be delighted,' said he, 'and thank you.'

I wrapped it up in a piece of paper that was there and gave it to him. But my lad appeared again next day and asked if I could spare another one. I said I could.

'I made it into about a dozen parts last night with the knife,' said he, 'and they all enjoyed it and asked me to try and get more.'

Well, he kept on calling on me and I would give him a quarter,[21] and sometimes I would give him more than a quarter to take to the mess with him. It was no loss to me: many's a good toast of rum he gave me and a box of tobacco, 'Rod and Gun.'

And that's the story of the Salonika milling.

NOTES

1 The book was published under the title *Ugam agus Bhuam* (Moireasdan 1977). The entire book is in Gaelic, without translation. Peter Morrison, a splendid source of oral tradition, stories and songs, died on 7 July 1978 in his 89th year. He had served in the First World War as a corporal with the Lovat Scouts, in Gallipoli, Egypt, Salonika and France. For a further account of him, with three of his stories and two songs of his own composition, see *Tocher* 16 (1974) 303–22. See also *Ugam agus Bhuam*, Introduction (Moireasdan 1977: ix–xxii).

2 BV3 d6 8827 in the Photographic Archive of the School of Scottish Studies. Another was published as the frontispiece in *Ugam agus Bhuam* (Moireasdan 1977).

3 SA 1966/94 A1 in the Archives of the School of Scottish Studies. The Gaelic text was printed in *Ugam agus Bhuam* (Moireasdan 1977: 85–90), under the title *'Bleith leis a' Bhrathainn ann a Sailoinigа'* ('Grinding with the Quern in Salonika'). A number of minor alterations in spelling have been made in the present

text, in line with the new standard orthographic recommendations. As the book has been out of print for a number of years, it was considered appropriate to print the Gaelic text here as well as an English translation. The Gaelic is a verbatim transcription from SA 1966/94 A1 and the English follows it as literally as possible. In transcription a very few slight hesitations have been passed over silently. I accept full responsibility for any errors or infelicities in either text.

4 In the final three items on the previous tape, SA 1966/93 B7–9, I had been interviewing Peter about his memories of grinding with the quern in his youth, grinding songs, etc. He said he had also used the quern in Salonika during the First World War: '*Bha mise bleith leis a' bhrathainn ann a Saloinigà 'n àm a' Chuid Chogaidh agus tha mi làn chreidsinn gum b'fhiach e innse* ...' ['I was grinding with the quern in Salonika myself at the time of the First War and I quite believe it would be worth telling'.] He went on to add that this was in the Struma Valley, about 94 kilometres from Salonika, and immediately embarked on the story. He had got only as far as to mention the bombardment of the road by the Bulgarians when the tape ran out. The tape was immediately changed and the present text (SA 1966/94 A1) recorded uninterrupted.

5 Eric Cregeen himself recorded information about the quern and its use from Peter Morrison on a later visit, on 31 March 1970 (SA 1970/65). At the same time he and the School of Scottish Studies technicians, Fred Kent and Ralph Morton, made a brief 8 mm. film recording of Peter grinding here on the quern.

6 *Comann* = ' company'. To the best of my recollection those present were Peter, his wife, one or two other members of his family and myself. It is possible that his friend and neighbour Donald MacLean (*Dòmhnall Sheonaidh Bhàin*) whom I had been recording earlier that day, was there also.

7 The Rev. Angus MacVicar, who served as Chaplain with the Cameron Highlanders and Lovat Scouts in the Struma Valley between 1916 and 1917 notes: 'The Lovat Scouts were withdrawn from Gallipoli in the spring [1916] and sent to Egypt, where they spent the whole summer kicking their heels in the desert. In October they arrived in Macedonia [Struma Valley] as an infantry battalion, the 10th Camerons, and were attached to the 82nd Brigade, 28th Division' (MacVicar 1966:62). Note, however, that Peter Morrison states that they had been 'eleven months in Egypt'.

8 *Rathad coise(adh)* = *lit.* 'foot road'.

9 It was a little surprising to find Peter using the English word *village* here, rather than a Gaelic term such as *baile beag*, etc. I have noticed, however, that in this text, he does tend to use English words much more freely than was his usual practice in narration. This may be partly due to the fact that he was describing what was certainly very much a bilingual Gaelic-English situation on the Struma Valley Front, as indeed in many other First World War situations. It may also be worth noting in this context that he renders English dialogue entirely in English, without any attempt at translation into Gaelic apart from the usual '*as esan*' ('said he'), etc.

10 *Verik*. This was how I transcribed the name, purely by ear, from Peter's telling. I believe, however, that it should probably be equated with *Verikon*, a village which is located on maps just south west of the Strimon River, about 4 km. south east of where the road from Salonika crosses the river. I am grateful to my colleague Ian Fraser for his help in matters of place-names and maps (see also Note 22).

11 The grain was wheat, as confirmed by Peter in a following interview on the same tape (SA 1966/94 A2). At home it was bere/barley (*eòrna*) that Peter Morrison had been used to grinding.

12 *An Ceann a Tuath* ('The North End/Head') is the usual Uist term for North Uist. *An Ceann a Deas* ('The South End/Head') is South Uist. *Tuathach* ('A Northerner') is 'A North Uist Man' and *Deasach* ('A Southerner') 'A South Uist Man', see pp. 40/44 below.

13 Roderick MacDonald, identified below by the usual patronymic system as *Ruairidh Thormaid 'ic Ruairidh* (Roderick son of Norman son of Roderick), see pp. 40/44 below.

14 A family of Mathesons living in the South-West of Grimsay when Peter was young. They were notable tradition bearers (Moireasdan 1977: x).

15 Lachlan Grant who was manager of the offshore island farm of Vallay, North Uist about the turn of the century.

16 I have taken *Mac Aonghais* to be the surname 'MacInnes' here rather than the patronymic 'son of Angus'. There is a tendency to use the surname rather than the patronymic when referring to someone from another island (Benbecula in this case) or an area not particularly well known to the speaker.

17 Some of Peter's quern terminology differs from that usually found elsewhere, e.g. in Dwelly's Dictionary, where a Lewis source is cited for most of the forms (Dwelly 1971: 111–12). *Sgonnan* for the 'turning handle'

and *breacadh* for 'picking'/'dressing' are usual. In the interview (1966/94 A2) following the present text, Peter glosses *sgonnan* as *làmhchrann*, which can be used for a wooden handle of various kinds (Dwelly 1971: 566). *Brod* can have various meanings, e.g. 'goad', 'dart', 'sting', 'flounder-spear' (Uist), 'poker', 'lid', 'best of anything', etc., but I have not encountered it elsewhere in connection with a quern. As used by Peter it would seem to combine the functions of 'spindle' and 'bearer' (the wooden cross-piece below the eye which supports the upper stone, Shetland 'sile'/'soil'). In the interview he calls the bearer *an drochaid* ('the bridge') and says that a pointed wooden *stob* ('pointed stick'/'pin') set in the lower stone (which he calls *a' leac iseal*) fits into a depression in the *drochaid*. *Sùil* ('eye') is the normal word used for the round hole in the centre of the upper stone of the quern into which the grain is poured. This usage was familiar to Peter who uses it without prompting in the interview, but in the present text he uses *sùil* to indicate a feature which I have not found described elsewhere: a ring or *fàinne* made by twisting a straw round the finger. This ring is then pushed down into the hole in the upper stone so that it rests on top of the bearer, apparently to control the flow of grain and thereby to regulate the relative coarseness or fineness of the meal. (See also pp. 41/45). For an account of the use of querns in the Northern Isles and related terminology and bibliography see A. Fenton *The Northern Isles: Orkney and Shetland* (Fenton (1978), (1997): 388–93, *et passim*).

18 *Eadar-theangair* = *lit.* 'interpreter'/'translator'.

19 Dwelly's Dictionary gives *lipinn* as 'quarter peck (measure for grain)', 'lippy' (Dwelly 1971: 592). This measure, usually a round wooden vessel like a small tub or barrel, was well known and used in Uist until comparatively recently.

20 Gilleasbuig MacDonald, Grimsay. It is interesting to find this reference to a *man* grinding with the quern. It had been my understanding that this was normally regarded as being women's work. See above, however, Peter Morrison's reference to himself grinding with the quern as a boy, with no suggestion in either case of there being anything unusual about this practice.

21 The late John MacLean, Carinish, North Uist. His brother Donald and Donald's son John, mentioned as living at Carinish Post Office, have both died since. Donald MacLean was himself a good tradition bearer. In October 1962 my then colleague Iain Crawford and I recorded a number of items from him, including an account of a method of making peat charcoal (SA 1962/44 A1). This was later published in *Scottish Studies* (Crawford 1964: 108–13).

22 *Sirus*. Transcribed thus from Peter's pronunciation on tape. This I believe to be the town which appears as both *Serrai* and *Sères* on maps of the Struma Valley, and figures prominently in the 1916 campaign.

23 *Tighinn air ais* ('coming back'). I assume that Peter means that he sent the raw bannocks to be baked at whatever kitchen or cooking facilities were available and that they came back to him from there.

24 *Ceathramh* = *lit.* 'a quarter'. Large girdle-size bannocks were usually divided into four large scones, each of which was called *ceathramh*. Professor Alexander Fenton tells me that in Scots, witness his own native usage from Aberdeenshire, the term 'quarters' (*quaarters*, earlier *korters*) was used for oatcakes, even when they were divided on the girdle with a kitchen knife into eighths.

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