



[Text of Speech at the Opening of the Aignish Cairn (in English and Gaelic)]

[English]

The Chairwoman of the Opening Committee gave me four pointers to expand on:

1. What made us think of this idea?

In retrospect I feel the answer to this first point is quite simple. It was the realisation that we as a community neglected to honour the memory of our heroes of the land struggle and it was something that needed to be done.

Perhaps however, there was more to it than that. There has been a revival of interest in all aspects of our culture in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland during the 20th century - but particularly during the second half of the 20th century.

- A. Our language.
- B. Our local history as is evident from the numerous local historical societies that sprang up all over the Highlands and Islands - including Lewis.
- C. Our heritage as is evident from the numerous local museum collections, a thing that we neglected in the past.
- D. Our literature as is evident from the spate of books that has appeared in the second half of the 20th century, both in Gaelic and English and covering a wide variety of subjects, including poetry etc.
- E. Religion, Drama, Songs, Festivals, etc.

Therefore, in the light of that revival of interest, perhaps it was only natural that our thoughts would sooner or later turn to honouring our local heroes of the crofters' struggle for the land of our ancestors. That indeed was what happened on Lewis in the late 1980s when a group of people met in Stornoway and decided that it was time to commemorate our unsung heroes of the land struggle. A committee was formed known as 'Cuimhneachan nan Gaisgeach' with representatives from various parts of Lewis, and it was decided to commemorate the four main events of the Lewis land struggle: Bernera 1874, Pairc 1887, Aignish 1888, and the final act when the Islanders challenged the Lewis proprietor, Lord Leverhulme, in the early 1920s.

The committee also decided to commission a bilingual book about the history of these four events.

2. What did we envisage happening initially?

From the outset we envisaged the building of the very best monuments we could possibly achieve. Monuments that might be worthy of the events and the people involved in the land struggle. Apparently unwittingly the committee set themselves a formidable programme and to some extent we were groping in the dark, because we did not have any money or any land for sites, or any clear idea of a design or who might help us to overcome our difficulties. Seemingly we walked by faith.

Providentially, two of our committee members were trained artists, Roddy Murray of An Lanntair and Malcolm MacLean of the National Gaelic Arts Project and after many meetings and much debate the name of Professor Will Maclean of Dundee University, who is regarded as the artist of the Highland Clearances and is an acclaimed international artist, came up.

We approached Professor Maclean and he immediately and enthusiastically agreed to design the memorials for us. He came to Lewis to acquaint himself with the nature of the proposed sites and the history of the events the committee wanted to commemorate. Furthermore, Professor Maclean offered his services free. We were left speechless. The designs of each of these memorials reflect the nature of the sites as well as the history of the events.

As we look back on these events, we cannot but agree with another Professor of Art, Professor Duncan Macmillan of Edinburgh University writing in a recent article in The Scotsman newspaper of 20th May 1996: 'It is a remarkable story, both in the past events it commemorates, and in the present community action and artistic collaboration that has led to this result.'

In these memorials we have a new approach to our local history. Our local history is hereby articulated and demonstrated in art form.

3. How has all that happened lived?

In the end we must confess that the success of the 'Cuimhneachain nan Gaisgeach' project exceeded our wildest dreams.

Certainly we had our disappointments, but we feel that the project generated a lively interest in, and appreciation of, our local history and the valuable heritage bequeathed to us by our forefathers who sacrificed much to secure the rights we take for granted.

4. Our strongest and most pleasurable memories of the project

Perhaps the committee's most pleasurable memory of this project is the generous support and encouragement we received from the local community as well as from friends from all walks of life - far and wide.

That support was amply demonstrated by the magnificent initiative shown by the public at the opening of these memorials. Obviously the local people adopted the project as their own community project. The project has also attracted attention throughout the country as an example of a people that are rightly proud of their own history.

Finally, a brief word about our team of three professional artists, our designer, our architect and our builder. It has given our committee very great pleasure to note the high place given by the art world to our artistic designer, Professor Will Maclean as the creator of this new form of expressing our local history in art.

Also, it was a great pleasure and privilege for our committee to work with our artistic architect John Norgrove, Mangersta, Uig, Lewis, the man who interpreted the designer's vision by preparing detailed working plans, without which the ideas of the designer could not be translated into meaningful objects of beauty. Furthermore, Mr Norgrove, like Professor Will Maclean, gave the committee a very pleasant surprise by donating his services free of charge and in that way both these men contributed a very substantial sum of money towards the cost of building these memorials.

Lastly, but not least, I come to our third professional member of the team, the builder, Jim Crawford, Garynahine, Lewis, the artistic stonemason who translated the vision of the designer and the working plans of our architect into lasting symbols of our forebears struggle for the land.

[Gaelic]

Dh'iarr neach-cathrach a'chomataidh fuasgladh orm leudachadh air ceithir puingean:

1. De thug oirn smaoineachadh air an seo?

A' coimhead air ais, saoilidh mi gu bheil freagairt na ciad ceist gu math simplidh. Thàinig sinn gu thuigsinn nach robh cuimhneachan againn mar choimhearsnachd air gaisgeach strì an fhearainn agus 's e rud a dh'fheumadh a bhith dèanta a bha an sin.

Ach 's docha gun robh barrachd air an sin ann. Tha athbheothachadh air a bhith anns an ùidh a thathas a' gabhail 'n ar cultar 's a Ghaidhealtachd agus anns na h-Eileanan anns an fhicheadamh linn - gu h-àraidh anns an dara leth de'n linn.

- A. Ar cànan.
- B. Ar n-eachdraidh ionadail mar a chithear leis an iomadh comunn eachdraidh ionadail a tha air nochdadh air feadh na Gaidhealtachd 's nan Eilean - Leòdhas nam measg.
- C. Ar dualchas mar a chithear bho'n iomadh cruinneachadh ann an taighean-tasgaidh ionadail, rud anns nach rohh diù againn roimhe seo.
- D. Ar litreachas mar a chithear leis na tha de leabhraichean air nochdadh anns an dara leth de'n fhicheadamh linn, an dà chuid anns a' Ghàidhlig agus a Bheurla a' toirt a steach iomadh cuspair, 'nam measg bàrdachd etc.
- E. Creidimh, Drama, Ceol, Feisean, etc.

Le sin, mar a bha ùidh dhaoine air athbheothachadh, 's docha gun robh e nàdarrach gun smaoinicheadh sinn uair neo uaireigin air urram a thoirt do ar gaisgich ionadail a bha an sàs ann an strì nan croitearan airson fearann ar sinnseirean. 'S e sin gun teagamh a thachair ann an Leòdhas anns na bliadhnanachan mu dheireadh de na 1980an an uair a choinnich buidheann dhaoine ann an Steòrnabhagh agus dh'aontaich iad gun robh an t-àm ann cuimhneachadh air gaisgich strì an fhearainn.

Chaidh comataidh a' stèidheachadh, 'Cuimhneachain Nan Gaisgeach' le riochdairean bho chearnaidhean eadar-dhealaichte de'n eilean, agus chaidh aontachadh gun deidheadh cuimhneachadh air na ceithir prìomh thachartasan ann an strì an fhearainn ann an Leòdhas: Bearnaraigh 1874, Pairc 1887, Aiginis 1888 agus an aimhreit mu dheireadh, nuair a sheas na h-eileanaich an aghaidh an uachdarain, am Morair Leverhulme, tràth 's na 1920an. Dh'aontaich a' chomataidh cuideachd gun coimiseanadh iad leabhar air eachdraidh nan tachartasan sin cuideachd.

2. De bh'againn 's an amharc an toiseach?

Bha sinn an dùil na carraigean-cuimhne a b'fhèarr a b'urrainn dhuinn a thogail. Carraigean-cuimhne a bhiodh airidh air na tachartasan agus na daoine a bha an sàs ann an aimhreit an fhearainn.

Chuir a' chomataidh program eagalach romhpa fhèin agus gu ìre bha sinn a' sporghail san dorchadas oir cha robh airgead neo talamh airson làraich againn, neo beachd soilleir air dealbhadh no co a b'urrainn ar cuideachadh. Bha creideas ga' cumail a' dol.

Gu fortanach, 's e luchd-ealain a bh' ann an dithis air a' chomataidh, Ruaraidh Moireach bho'n Lanntair agus Calum Macgilleathain bho Phroiseact nan Ealan, agus an dèidh iomadh coinneamh agus moran deasbad chaidh am Proifeasair Will (Uilleam?) Macgilleathain à Oilthigh Dhùin Dè ainmeachadh neach ealain aig a bheil cliù eadar-nàiseanta agus a tha air a mheasadh mar dhealbhadair nam Fuadaichean.

Bhruidhinn sinn ri Proifeasair Macgilleathain agus dh'aontaich e 'sa bhad gun dealbhadh e na carraigean-cuimhne dhuinn. Thàinig e a Leòdhas gus eolas a chuir air na làraich a bhathas a' moladh agus air eachdraidh nan tachartasan a bha a' chomataidh airson a cuimhneachadh. A thuilleadh air an sin, thuir am Proifeasair MacGilleathain gun deanadh e an obair a nasgaidh. Cha robh fhios againn de chanadh sinn. 'Tha an dealbhadh airson na carraigean-cuimhne sin a' nochdadh nàdar nan làraich a thuilleadh air na tachartasan eachdraidheil.

Nuair a choimheadas sinn air ais air na tachartasan sin, feumaidh sinn aontachadh le Proifeasair Ealan eile, am Proifeasair Donnachadh Macmhaolain à Oilthigh Dhùin Eidinn, a sgrìobh anns an *Scotsman* air 20 An Cèitean 1996: "s e sgeulachd inntinneach a tha ann, an dà chuid anns na tachartasan a bha ann agus anns na cuimhneachan, agus ann an coimhearsnachd an là an-diugh tha co-obrachadh gnìomh agus ealain air seo a choimhlionadh.'

Tha sinn a' coimhead air ar n-eachdraidh ionadail ann an dòigh eile le na cuimhneachan seo. Tha ar n-eachdraidh ionadail air a soilleireachadh agus air a nochdadh ann an dreach ealain.

3. A bheil na tha air tachairt air ar plana choilleanadh?

Feumaidh sinn aideachadh gu bheil Cuimhneachain Nan Gaisgeach air a bhith nas soirbheachail na bha dùil againn.

Gun teagamh, bha briseadh dùil againn, ach tha sinn a' faireachdainn gu bheil am proiseact air ùidh agus luach ar 'n eachdraidh ionadail a thogail, agus air aire dhaoine a tharraing chun an dualchais luachmhor a dh'fhàg ar sinnsirean againn - iadsan a rinn uiread de stri gus am biodh na coirichean a tha againn an-diugh tèarainte.

4. A' chuimhne as laidire/as tlachdmhor a th' againn mun phroiseact

'S docha gur e an taic agus am brosnachadh a fhuair sinn bho'n choimhearsnachd ionadail agus bho ar caraidean fad is farsuing, a' chuimhne as tlachdmhor a tha aig a' chomataidh air a' phroiseact seo.

Bha an taic sin follaiseach bho'n t-sluagh nuair a bhathas a' fuasgladh nan carraigean-cuimhne. Tha e soilleir gun robh an sluagh ionadail a' coimhead air a' phroiseact mar phroiseact coimhearsnachd. Tha am proiseact cuideachd air aire dhaoine a tharraing air feadh na duthcha mar eisimpleir de shluagh a tha moiteil as an eachdraidh fhein.

'San dealachadh, beagan mu ar sgioba de thriuir luchd-ealain proifeiseanta, ar dealbhadair an ailtire agus ar neach-togail. Tha an cliu mor a tha aig ar dealbhadair ann an saoghal nan ealan, am Proifeasair Will (Uilleam?) MacGill'eachain, a chruthaich an ... [incomplete]

[Delivered at the opening of the cairn on 16th August 1996.]

[ends]

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