



## [The Marriage of Penelope Mackenzie and Rev. John Macrae (1833)]

By all accounts, both Penelope Mackenzie and her husband Rev. John Macrae were unusual characters who made a deep and lasting impression on the people of Lewis, and indeed many other people throughout the Highlands in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Penelope was the daughter of Captain Thomas Mackenzie, one time Tacksman at Bayble. John Macrae, otherwise affectionately known as 'Macrath Mor' (John with the thunderous voice), was born at Kintail in 1794, and ordained at Ness, Isle of Lewis as a Minister in 1833 at the age of 39 years. Also, in 1833, after an unusual romance, Penelope and John were united in the bond of marriage.

Apparently, Penelope was extremely popular. Among her admirers was a certain Divinity student friend of John Macrae, and in the absence of any real encouragement from Penelope, John Macrae's friend urged him to employ his undoubted persuasive powers with Penelope on his behalf. Reluctantly, John Macrae proceeded to Bayble to plead on behalf of his friend. He genuinely used his very best endeavours, but to no avail.

At length, on the doorstep, as John Macrae was leaving, he made one final appeal on behalf of his friend, to which the young lady responded with a charming smile: 'Mr Macrae, all your appeals are for your friend. Have you no word to say for yourself?'

Big John Macrae was swept off his feet on that doorstep. He lost his heart to that charming young lady.

Rev. John Macrae was Minister at Ness from 1833 (Free Church Minister from 1843, at Knockbain from 1849, at Lochs from 1857, and at Carloway from 1864 to 1871) when he retired, and subsequently went to live at Greenock where he died in 1876.

Penelope, his beloved wife, died while they were at Lochs, and she is buried in St. Colm Cille Island, Loch Erisort. Rev. Macrae erected a walled enclosure around Penelope's grave and headstone, leaving one space for his own remains. But when he died in 1876 in Greenock at the age of 83 years, his request to be buried beside his wife in St. Colm Island apparently was not possible because of the distance and the prevailing transport facilities at that time.

Penelope's last resting place in the ancient cemetery at Eilean Chalum Cille is quite conspicuous, and in view of the couple's place in the history of the Church and the Highlands, it is well worth viewing.

The marked graves of the two sons of Rev. Robert Finlayson, the Lochs Minister's sons, who were drowned in Loch Erisort, may also be seen in the cemetery at Eilean Chalum Cille.

The ruins of St. Colm Church, which functioned there upwards of 1000 years ago, may also be seen in the graveyard. It has a double wall with galleries between the two walls.

[ends]

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