



Ailtean (date unrecorded)

The Hill of the Big House (Cnoc an Tigh Mhoir) is a small hill in the middle of the crofter township of Cromore. Apparently that hill got its name from a big house that stood there at one time in the distant past. The Big House was the residence of an influential man known as 'Ailtean', about whom little is known, neither is there any evidence of the ruins of his house, and the stones of any old abandoned ruins in the area would be used up in the later buildings.

Local tradition pin-points 'Cnoc an Tigh Mhoir' as part of croft no.5 Cromore, and there are a few modern crofter houses standing on that hill now, which is probably far bigger than any 'Tigh Mòr' that might have been there in the distant past. Nevertheless the 'Tigh Mòr' of the past could well have been 'big' in its day.

Oral tradition relates that from time to time a ship put into the harbour at Cromore with supplies for the 'Big House', and 'Ailtean' wanted his daughter Kirsty to marry the Captain of the ship because he felt that none of the local people were eligible as a married partner for a woman of the elevated station of his only daughter. Also he felt that Kirsty was getting too fond of 'Roderick' the sgalag (man servant).

Kirsty for her part did not feel any affection for the Sea Captain, and she continued her clandestine amorous affair with Roderick, much to the disappointment of her over protective father. Eventually 'Ailtean' resolved to end this undesirable match and he hatched a dark plot that was designed to end in the drowning of Roderick and leave the way clear for the marriage of Kirsty to the Captain.

In due course the supply ship came into Cromore Bay as usual but on this occasion it was a stormy day and while normally 'Ailtean' would have waited till the storm abated before sending the small open boat out to the ship to collect his supplies, he insisted on this occasion that Roderick should go out to the ship as usual, although it was obviously dangerous and inadvisable to risk going out in a small boat in the weather conditions that prevailed that day.

Probably Kirsty understood her father's dark motives very well and she resolved that if Roderick was to be drowned, she wanted to be by his side in death as well as life, and she insisted on accompanying Roderick on his dangerous mission.

Nothing would dissuade her from her purpose, and before the small boat was half way out to the ship a strong squall of wind caught it, and it capsized and the two young people were drowned. Subsequently their bodies were recovered from the sea, locked together in each other's arms and tradition relates that they were buried side-by-side in a private grave at 'Lios an Teampuill' at the foot of 'Cnoc an Tigh Mhoir' on the south side, where there is a green knoll to this day, near where the dwelling house of the late 'Murchadh Anna' Mackenzie was.

It was said that in due course two trees, one on each side of the young peoples' grave, grew up over the grave and joined together to form an arch above the grave. The trees are no longer to be seen, but 'Ailtean's Well', 'Tobair Ailtean' is still in the vicinity, and any of the local people will show you where the well is, near the road on the way to the 'Ard Dhubh' on croft 26 Cromore. 'Tobair Ailtean' was used by the Cromore people until a piped water supply came to the village in the 1950s.

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Date:

Original document title: Ailtean

Location in physical archive: Series K, File 1, Section 23

NRAS reference: NRAS 4336/1/9/1

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