



Six Gravir Men Drown at Ranish (c 1873)

Before the vehicular road linking Park with Stornoway was completed in 1928 it was customary for groups of crofter/fishermen from any one of the various villages of Park to take one or other of the local fishing boats, and go to Stornoway for household provisions and shopping, and return in the evening.

In about 1873 a group of six fishermen from Gravir went to Stornoway for the day. They were:

Roderick Campbell	Ruaraidh Iain	18 Gravir	age 44
Alastair Campbell (brother of Roderick, above)	Alastair Iain	18 Gravir	age 53
Neil Carmichael	Niall Dhomhnuill Neil	14 Gravir	age 17
Donald Macmillan	Domhnull Bàrd	14 Gravir	age 44
Kenneth Nicolson	Coinneach Iain ic Aonghais	12 Gravir	age 20
John Macphail	An Grèasaich son of Donald Macphail	19 Gravir	age 28

The boat left Stornoway as usual in the evening, but the wind was rising. As they were approaching Loch Grimshader at 'Clach na Gaoith Tuath' the wind was getting so strong that they lowered the sail and edged their way forward round the point with oars, but apparently the boat, which was heavy with provisions such as bolls of meal and flour, foundered there.

The first indication the people had that the boat was lost was when people from Ranish found bolls of flour and other provisions on the foreshore. A search was organised, and all six bodies were recovered, and the upturned empty boat was found at the Bràigh near Stornoway.

The victims of this tragedy were buried on St. Colm Island in Loch Erisort. All of them were married, and between them they left about 26 children.

Padruig Ruaraidh, 18 Gravir, and Seonaidh a Ghrèasaich Macphail were born in 1873 and 1872 respectively, and were therefore only very young babies when their fathers were drowned. Iain Alastair, born in 1860 would only have been about 3 years old, and Kenneth Nicolson's family were also very young. The families of Neil Carmichael and Donald 'Bàrd' Macmillan were up in years, and some of them were married.

The Gravir Bàrd 'Uilleam Neill 'ic Phail' of 19 Gravir visited the cemetery at St. Colm's Isle in the 1930s, and he composed the following song:

Reflections - At The Old Churchyard of Colm Cille, Loch Erisort

Stranger, tread softly o'er each mound
 This spot, this dust, 'tis hallowed ground
 Disturb thou not the peace profound
 Within these beds of clay.
 'God's acre', this, all sown around
 The shrine in ruins grey.

Nor dream to 'scape the common doom
 Of those who sleep within the tomb
 In this lone Isle, the shrine and home
 Of saints in days of yore
 Whose faith illumed the mystic gloom
 Of pagan rites and lore.

Tread lightly here, 'tis sacred all
 The sod, the shrine, the mouldering wall
 'Mong crumbling dust thy footsteps fall
 Scoff not, nor yet profane
 The dead: asleep till the trumpets call
 To judgement wakes again.

Thy step withhold, dread thou to lay

Impious foot 'pon mortal clay
Presumptuous man their fate today
Tomorrow will be thine
Death is the debt mankind must pay
'Tis nature's law divine.

Exemption, none can urge or claim
The rich and poor, this fate the same
All must submit - man's mortal frame
The grave - the dust - his bed
'Tis Heaven's decree can wealth or fame
Revoke the edict dread?

Within this spot, 'God's acre' sown
The rank weeds hide each old tombstone
The name, the year inscribed thereon
Time's wasting hand well nigh
Hath blotted out, scarce ought is shown
That records would supply.

Scarce relic left, or script to show
Whose ashes moulder here below
Ye who their lineage fain would know
Approach with reverence near
The turf that veils their mansion low
O! Moisten with a tear.

Your kindred rest in this remote
Neglected, rude, sad, silent spot
Unknown, obscure, unsung, forgot
Wrapped by the sacred soil
Oblivion's dreamless sleep their lot
And destiny the while.

They lie unhonoured and unknown
In this rude, Island Churchyard lone
Their names effaced, their records gone
The meek, the sage, the just
Each underneath the cold, grey stone
Forgotten in the dust.

The victims of the stormy wave
Are gathered to earth's breast - the grave
Therein the ancient ruined nave
Of yonder shrine they sleep
Your kith and kin, whom none could save
From death upon the deep.

Yet shall they live: let none gainsay
What 'Holy Writ' the Scriptures say
The dead shall rise and hopes bright ray
All radiant from on high
Shall usher in eternal day
O'er faith's triumphant sky.

By William Macphail of 19 Gravir

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