



ISLANDS BOOK TRUST TIREE CONFERENCE: FRIDAY 13th – SATURDAY 14th SEPTEMBER 2024

‘IN SEARCH OF BALEPHUIL’S HIDDEN PAST – TRACING THE HISTORY OF A TIREE TOWNSHIP AND ITS PEOPLE’

VENUE: An Talla, Tiree – proceedings will also be accessible over the internet by livestreaming.

This important conference brings together residents of Tiree, members of the Tiree diaspora, and scholars from a range of different backgrounds, to consider the history and cultural achievements of the people of a single crofting township: Balephuill in the south-west of the island. All are welcome to attend and participate in the discussions, either in-person or over the internet.

A superficial glance at Balephuill’s natural beauty and tranquil appearance today may suggest that nothing much has happened here for centuries. But this could not be further from the truth. The people of Balephuill have experienced dramatic economic changes. Between the late 18th century and first decades of the 20th century, these have included the kelp boom; the creation of Balephuill crofting township by the landlord with a large number of small crofts and the encouragement of fishing; major population expansion followed by large scale emigration following the Famine; further land reorganisation by the landlord with the removal of some crofters from the township and the amalgamation of crofts; a political uprising over land reform in 1886; and a Government resettlement scheme including land at West Hynish approved in 1913.

While every community is unique, and many have suffered hardship and insecurity, how far did Balephuill’s often tumultuous history differ from that of other parts of the island and shape the character of its community? Is it coincidence that Balephuill became known as *Baile nam Bàrd* (the township of the poets) and *Baile nan Gràs* (the township of grace), while in more recent times the area has inspired painters and musicians. Today, Balephuill is home to a whisky distillery, perhaps following in the footsteps of older (and less legal) traditions?!

These are amongst the questions which will be debated at the conference. The results of research carried out by the School of Scottish Studies and others will be presented, and the evidence coming from various sources explored, including what the landscape reveals as well as the written records and a rich oral legacy. It is hoped that the event will stimulate further research, and demonstrate that detailed local studies can shed considerable light on the wider history of the Highlands and Islands.

ALL ARE WELCOME TO ATTEND IN-PERSON OR REMOTELY. DISCOUNT FOR TIREE RESIDENTS ATTENDING IN-PERSON – PLEASE COMPLETE SIGN-UP FORM AT BACK TO BOOK PLACES

IBT is grateful for financial or in-kind support towards the conference from:

Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh

An Iodhlann and the Tiree community

Private donations and voluntary support



Extract from the 1768-69 plan of Tiree by James Turnbull showing Balephuil prior to the creation of the first crofts in the early 19th century (courtesy of Argyll Papers)

LIST OF SPEAKERS

Alan Boyd – Author and Gaelic scholar

Professor Sir Ian Boyd – Former Chief Scientific Adviser at DEFRA

Dr Bob Chambers – Crofting historian

Alison Diamond – Archivist for the Argyll Papers

Dr John Holliday – Chair of An Iodhlann

Dr Cathlin Macaulay – Curator of School of Scottish Studies Archives, University of Edinburgh

Dr Margaret Mackay – Former Director of School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh

Dr Donald E. Meek – Former University Professor and Tiree crofter

John Randall – Chair of Islands Book Trust

Ian Smith - Musician, crofter, local entrepreneur

Professor Paul Warde – Professor of Environmental History, University of Cambridge

PROGRAMME

Friday 13th September

12 noon – 1.00pm: *Registration and Buffet Lunch*

SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION AND GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND (Chair: John Randall)

1.00pm: Introduction to Conference – JOHN RANDALL

1.15pm: Environmental Background to Balephuill and Tìree – IAN BOYD

2.00pm: 'A Cold Wind': Medieval and Post-medieval Balephuill – JOHN HOLLIDAY

2.45pm – 3.15pm: Tea Break

SESSION 2: CROFTING AND 'THE TÌREE PROJECT' (Chair: Donald Meek)

3.15pm: The Creation and Survival of the Balephuill Crofting Township 1800-1900 – BOB CHAMBERS

4.15pm: Balephuill and 'The Tìree Project' – MARGARET MACKAY

5.15pm – 5.45pm: Questions and Discussion on Afternoon Sessions

6.30pm – 8.00pm: Dinner

AFTER DINNER PRESENTATION (Chair: Margaret Mackay)

8.00pm – 9.00pm: The Oral Traditions of Balephuill – CATHLIN MACAULAY

Saturday 14th September

SESSION 3: BALEPHUILL IN CONTEXT (Chair: Donald Meek)

9.30am: Balephuill in Context: An Economic and Demographic History – PAUL WARDE

10.15am: 'A Great Commotion': The Land Struggle in Balephuill 1884-1886 – JOHN HOLLIDAY

11.0am - 11.30am: Coffee Break

SESSION 4: BALEPHUILL PEOPLE AND CULTURE 1 (Chair: Bob Chambers)

11.30am: Off-Croft Activities in Balephuill – Fishing, Whisky, Tourism and Music – IAN SMITH

12.15pm: Balephuill and its People – ALAN BOYD

1.00pm – 2.00pm: Buffet Lunch

SESSION 5: BALEPHUILL PEOPLE AND CULTURE 2 (Chair: John Holliday)

2.00pm: 'Baile nam Bàrd' is 'Baile nan Gràs' - Sacred and Secular interactions in the community of Balephuill – DONALD MEEK

3.00pm: Painting Balephuill – MARGARET MACKAY

3.45pm – 4.15pm: Tea Break

SESSION 6: FUTURE RESEARCH, PUBLICATION, AND CONCLUSIONS (Chair: John Randall)

4.15pm: The Argyll Papers as a Basis for Research – ALISON DIAMOND

4.45pm: IBT Conference Publication – JOHN RANDALL

5.00pm: Reflections and Conclusions on the Conference – JOHN HOLLIDAY

5.15pm -6.00pm: Questions and General Discussion

SIGN – UP FORM (for bookings, please complete form and return to Anna MacKenzie as below)

Name

Address

Telephone

Email

	IBT Members	Non-members
All sessions (inclusive of meals/refreshments)	£100	£120
All sessions (excluding meals/refreshments)	£30	£50
Price per session (excl. meals/refreshments)	£7	£10

Tiree residents and full-time students: £20 for 2 days (excluding meals/refreshments) or £5 per session (excluding meals/refreshments).

Prices above excluding meals/refreshments will apply to those joining conference remotely. Meals/refreshments for 2 days include 2 buffet lunches, 1 dinner, 3 teas/coffees. Overnight accommodation not included in prices.

For information on travel to and from Tiree, see www.calmac.co.uk and www.loganair.co.uk

For information on accommodation in Tiree, see www.isleoftiree.com/places-to-stay

For queries or to pay by BACS, please contact Anna MacKenzie of Islands Book Trust by emailing sales@islandsbooktrust.org or phoning 07930 801899. PLEASE BOOK ASAP: PRICES ABOVE ONLY APPLY FOR BOOKINGS RECEIVED BY 31st AUGUST 2024

PLEASE MAKE CHEQUES PAYABLE TO 'THE ISLANDS BOOK TRUST' AND RETURN WITH COMPLETED FORM TO: Anna MacKenzie, Islands Book Trust, Kinloch Community Hub, Balallan, Isle of Lewis, HS2 9PN.