

May 13th



Memory verse

Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance:
behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. Isaiah 40:15

Map Work

Today we come to the island story that I promised you earlier in the week. Before we start, find St Kilda, the furthest west of all the Hebridean islands, on the Ordnance Survey Map.¹ Now use the OS map to identify the bay in the picture above. What is the name of the rock you can see out to sea in the picture? You can just see the little jetty, built in 1902 towards the left hand end of the bay in the picture and, curving away from it, past the research buildings, towards the bottom of the page is what was once the village street of a thriving community.

Something to read

Nobody lives on St Kilda now except a few research scientists, National Trust volunteers and military personnel. None of these remain on the island permanently; they all come and go. But in 1823...

From the Diary of Rev John MacDonald of Ferintosh (The Apostle of the North) (1779–1849)
13th May 1823

We had no sooner appeared in sight than the people flew down to the shore to meet us, and stood in a body on the shelving rock on which we were to land, to receive ourselves and our little bark. We had no sooner effected a landing (which owing to the mild state of the weather, was not difficult), than they all pressed around me, and grasped my hand each in his turn, when I thought they would have wrung the very blood out of it. Few words passed for a minute or two, but tears trickled from every eye. I was overcome myself.

At last silence broke, and, says one here and there, "This is a surprise." "This is more than we looked for." "We little expected to see his face again" (for they addressed themselves to one another), "God bless him for this visit. He will bless him whatever becomes of us." After I could speak, for God knows my heart was full, I told them I came once more to see them, at the request of the Society in Edinburgh, who took an interest in their welfare. "Many thanks, many blessings on

¹ You can find it here: <https://www.bing.com/maps>, select Ordnance Survey from the drop down box on the right of the screen and search for "St Kilda".

the head of the society for their attention to us and for sending you among us.” “And now that I have come,” said I, “to labour for a short time among you, I trust you will endeavour to make good use of the opportunity thus afforded you.” “Yes, yes,” they say, “as we can, and the Lord enable us to do so.”

All hands were now called to unload the boat and haul it ashore – a process which took them nearly three hours, so that it was eight o'clock before we reached the village. We immediately entered the old barn in which we were wont to assemble, offered prayer and praises to God for His mercies, and especially His kindness in permitting us to meet again...

Before dismissing the people, I stated to them what I intended should be the plan of my future labours among them, and that besides meeting for service once a day as formerly, we should also meet for an exercise, somewhat resembling family worship, when I should read a chapter of Scripture and make some observations on it, calculated to instruct them in its meaning and to point out the improvement they should make of it. I told them that it was my wish to direct their attention as much as possible to the Scriptures; and that if we met in the morning, which I conceived would be the most convenient season of the day, as interfering less with their other business, this would be a proper way of commencing the day, and the exercise might be of use to them in carrying on their daily occupations. They gladly assented, and with one voice replied, “We can easily manage our other business, and what is everything else to this?” We accordingly fixed on hours of from seven to nine in the morning for the lecture, and from six to eight at night for the sermon.

Dr John Macdonald had visited the island of St Kilda the previous year. Here is how his biographer, writing in 1866, described the island:

The island of St Kilda rises remote, wild, and barren out of the waste of waters in the western sea. It presents a high rampart of rugged rocks to the billows of the ocean on all its sides, broken only by two chasms through which alone, for all wingless animals, access to the land is possible. On the east side, the ground slopes towards one of these openings, and in front of it, near the shore, are clustered together the rude huts of the inhabitants. Behind the hamlet the ground rises gradually towards the north west, passing on the south side into the higher slopes of **Ruaveil**, and on the north rising into the rugged steeps of **Congar**, while on the north east stands the **Orwall** hill, like a stern sentry keeping watch. In the valley between Orwall and Congar is the land the people till, and from the produce of which they obtain their scanty supply of bread. The fulmar and the solan geese [Northern



Ganet], which in myriads nestle in the rocky ramparts of the island, bring to the people their only source of income. The danger attending their mode of killing these birds to procure their fat and feathers, they brave most fearlessly... Without the vibration of a nerve, and speaking in a voice that knows no tremor, the islander, with a rude rope around his waist, held by friendly hands that shake not as they grasp it, goes over the edge of a precipice three hundred feet in height, and hanging over the sharp rocks around which, far below, the raging sea is lashed into foam – his foot now touching a narrow ledge, and then his whole weight straining the strand by which he is suspended...[he] loads his shoulders... and is only drawn to the summit when he can carry no more.



Dr John MacDonald, a gifted preacher in the Gaelic language, first visited St Kilda in 1822 and at that time there were 108 people living on the island. He found them living in “black houses”² –

2 Information about these including how to build your own (!) here: <http://naturalhomes.org/blackhouse.htm>

stone thatched dwellings without chimneys common in the Highlands of Scotland – self sufficient in food and clothing and paying their rent to their landlord's “tacksman” in feathers and other produce. The islanders spoke only Gaelic and most were unable to read. They governed themselves by a meeting rather like a parliament (but which consisted of *all* the men of the island) and its decisions were unanimous. Despite having had a succession of Presbyterian ministers of sorts in the past and a Gaelic teacher, Dr MacDonald found to his grief when he arrived in 1822 that there were, as far as he could tell, no Christians among them and that they had no knowledge of the way of salvation.

By the end of his first visit things had begun to change dramatically on the island. Dr MacDonald preached to the islanders every day and they flocked to hear him, drinking in his words and openly weeping with sorrow over their sin. However, he was much concerned. “I have seen such impressions, as I have witnessed this day, drive men to their Bibles, and to the throne of grace,” he wrote, “But these poor people cannot read, and how to pray they know not. The Lord pour out upon them the spirit of grace and supplications... What the result is, He alone knows who has said, 'My word shall not return to me void'...”

When Dr MacDonald had to leave the island after that first visit, the Lord did indeed “pour out upon them the spirit of grace and supplications” and (as we read above) when he returned in 1823 he found they had not been wasting their time. He was soon preaching to them again and was delighted to see, “...several of the people mark the places in their bibles as if with a view to examine them after going home...” During the year that had intervened several of the young people had learned to read as well as some of those who were older. All this they had done *without any help* as Dr MacDonald noted in his diary:

Saturday, May 28.—This day Mr. M'Lellan [the “tacksman”] and I examined the school here established by the Society for the support of Gaelic Schools. There were present in all fifty-seven—thirty-five males and twenty-two females. Among them I was pleased to see several grown up and married persons, at least sixteen or eighteen; and considering that they were *deprived of their teacher* [i.e. they had somehow managed to teach themselves!] for nearly the last twelve months, the appearance they made was wonderful. About nine of them can read the New Testament with tolerable ease; many besides can read small portions of it; and upwards of forty read considerable parts of the Psalm Book—a species of composition of which, from their musical turn, they seem to be very fond. In short, young and old acquitted themselves beyond my expectations.

(NB:-This shows that the will to read can overcome all obstacles even the lack of a teacher!)

After that, things on the island prospered spiritually. Eventually a little church and a manse was built and a godly minister and his wife came to live on the island and share its hardy way of life.

If you look at the OS map you will not find the three names I have highlighted in **green** on it. I think this is because all the place names on the map are in Gaelic. Dr MacDonald's biographer, writing for an English speaking audience, has used English forms of the names. I think you will be able to find the places on the map if you make a note of the following points:

Bh in Gaelic is pronounced *v* in English. That should help you find Ruaveil in the south west.

Bh can also be represented by *w* in English. That should help you find Orwall to the north east of the village.

Ch in Gaelic is a sound we do not have in English but the Scots use it in *loch* and the Welsh in *bach*. I think the biographer has transliterated it as a *g*. This should help you find Congar in the north (east). My guesses as to where they are on the map are on the next page. Don't peep until you've tried to find them!

I think they are Ruabhal, Oisebhal and Conachair.

Sadly, life became difficult on St Kilda in the twentieth century and the population dwindled. In 1930 the remaining islanders asked the government to help them resettle on the mainland.

Something to think about

Do you remember the islanders' words when asked whether they could make time for a morning meeting? "...what is everything else to this?" What a lovely attitude they showed! I think we should write those words, as it were, over our family devotional times together.

Speaking

If you enjoyed reading out the king's speech yesterday, you might enjoy today's very famous speech. On **13th May** 1940 Winston Churchill delivered his famous "blood, sweat, toil and tears" speech in the House of Commons. The full text of the speech is in the Optional Resources file for today and it is very topical as we were thinking about VE day on 7th May.³ The speech comes from the very early days of the war so remember, if you are able to listen, that VE day was far in the future and no one had any idea what they were going to endure and how things would end. What techniques can you hear Churchill using to get his point over? What happens to the pitch of his voice towards the end of his speech? Try to read the speech out loud. If you don't think you can manage it all, just tackle the last two paragraphs.

3 You can listen to the speech here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=80_HXIH724