

The Battle of Carinish

Contributed by Norman MacLean

In the year 1601 a group of men from Harris sailed to the islands and landed at Sidinish in North Uist. They were a bad bunch, and the worst of the lot was their chieftain, a man called Domhnall Glas. He was set on bringing harm to the people of North Uist.

There were about forty of them, and they made the long trek from Sidinish to the town of Carinish. When they reached Trinity Temple the local people all ran away. The poor souls had put all their goods in the temple, hoping they would be safe there. But as the men grew ever closer the local women began to panic and cry.

However, help was at hand. Unbeknownst to anyone, local hero Mac Iain 'Ic Sheumais had walked all the way up (or as they say in Uist, down) from Eriskay, through South Uist and Benbecula, over the tidal crossing and finally to Carinish, where he found a hiding place behind the Temple.

At about 3 o' clock in the afternoon Domhnall Glas and his servant boy came along, the boy carrying a pitcher in his hand. He wanted to show off his prowess and importance, so he ordered the boy to pour him a special dram into a quaich.

Once the boy had finished pouring the whisky, and Domhnall Glas was about to raise the Quaich to his lips, a quiet voice was heard speaking the following words:

'You poured it. But you'll never drink it.'

All of a sudden, from what seemed like nowhere, came an arrow, piercing Domhnall Glas's throat. He died quickly, but with the parting words 'Between Carinish in the North and Ludag in the South there is only one man who is responsible for this – Mac Iain 'Ic Sheumais!'

As soon as his last words were spoken, out came the MacDonalds from where they had been hiding and a great battle was fought against the Harrismen with bows and arrows, and many men were killed.

That's why there is a spot called the 'Ditch of Blood' in Carinish, there to this day.

But even Mac Iain 'Ic Sheumais did not escape from the battle unscathed and was tended over by a kind woman. His story can be heard in the song 'A Mhic Iain 'Ic Sheumais'. And there you have the story of the Battle of Carinish.