



Episode 2: Fuadach

Deirdre Graham [host]: Hallo agus fàilte chridheil oirbh gu Gaelic Song Stories, am pod-chraoladh far am bi mise, Deirdre Ghreumach, a' toirt sùil air na sgeulachdan air cùlaibh nan òran.

Hello and a very warm welcome to Gaelic Song Stories with me, Deirdre Graham.

This week I am thrilled to be joined by folklorist, singer and writer Margaret Bennett. Hailing from the Isle of Skye, Margaret comes from a long line of traditional singers and pipers - Gaelic on her mother's side and Lowland Scots on her father's. She credits her family upbringing with her expertise in Scottish Folklore and folk song, though she has a post-grad Master's in Folklore and a PhD in Ethnology. Widely regarded as "Scotland's foremost folklorist" she is known to "wear her scholarship lightly,".

Margaret has also been a family friend for many years and so our conversation took on various twists and turns along the way! When I think back to the years when I studied at the RCS, I remember fondly the folklore course that Margaret delivered and all of us were enraptured by her lectures. Today I am equally as captivated and it gives me great pleasure to share with you a charming conversation we had.

We flit between stories and songs from both sides of the Atlantic trying to make some sense of the numerous reasons that so many Gaels emigrated from Scotland. At the heart of them all is a person's voice and their lived experience. Where the history books tell one story, the songs offer us another and through our conversation we get a sense of their anger and loss but we also feel their optimism in making a new start in a new place - àite b' fheàrr dùbailte; a place doubly better.

We pick up our story at the devastating Battle of Culloden, fought on the 16th April 1746, a battle in all its complexities that I do not fully understand but, undoubtedly, was the most significant conflict on Scottish soil that changed our cultural and political landscape forever.

Thereafter we take an emotional journey to the Carolinas, through the American Wars of Independence before returning to Scotland and starting to unpick another tale of emigration; the potato famine that so sorely hit the Highlands.

Finally our journey takes us to Quebec, where Margaret herself lived for a year. She also spent many years in Newfoundland and during this time she met with and became friends with descendants of those who had emigrated on these perilous journeys years before and she has many of their family accounts recorded in precious conversations, some of which she is kindly sharing with us today.

DG: Margaret it is a real pleasure and a delight to be with you this afternoon and thank you so much for meeting with me. I'm really honoured that you are giving your time and your knowledge on this incredible subject of immigration and emigration.



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Margaret Bennett [guest]: It's been very close to my heart, but the other thing that makes this easy is that I've known you for a long time.

DG: Absolutely!

MB: And it's just lovely to meet up again...

DG: After so long as well!

MB: And to see what you're doing. That you're following on, carrying on these stories behind the songs. And singing them.

DG: Yeah I think that it's something that has always fascinated me and I think that it's something that was bound to, with my mum's influence.

MB: Mhm.

DG: On my life, and her steeping me in songs and stories predominantly from Skye. But I think through that I always got snapshots of story, and certainly with regards to immigration that was something that I had a glimpse of, and perhaps as a child a much more... child-friendly approach to the subject because the reality is something is a lot more brutal and really quite harrowing. And my own thoughts when I think on emigration from Scotland, I think on the Highland Clearances, and I think of Patrick Sellar, and that... abhorrent, horrible mistreatment of people, but of course there are so many other strands that play into how the Gael came to be abroad and particularly in Canada in America, well what is now the United States.

MB: Yes. Very few of us don't have distant relatives in these distant lands.

DG: Mhm. Perhaps for a starting point we could set the scene in a bigger context and go back slightly to the time of the battle of Culloden, which is a marker of... a change, an absolute change in highland culture, and drenched in songs.

MB: Yes. It's totally... And, they say that in fact it's probably true there are very very few songs composed at the time in Scots, there's maybe one which is ehm, Johnny Cope after the Battle of Preston Pans, but the others are all from the point of view of the Gael, from the heart and soul and mind of the Gael. The history books tell one story, and it's the official story. The one that's... they want the world to know. But those who were there tell another story.

And when you think for example of the lament of Christina Chisholm for her husband who was mowed down, it's just heartbreaking, or I think more recently of a - when it flew into my mind! - when we had Syrian refugees into our little community in Comrie we had a day of hosting them and welcoming them to the community and some of them had really escaped with the clothes they wore. They had little English, there was an interpreter, and we had to put on a cèilidh. They danced and they had wonderful dances and costumes. And I wanted to somehow reach out to them and say: 'You know, you might think we don't understand your story, but can I share just one moment, a little - if you like - cameo of our story, which like you, had dreadful atrocities. And this is a song written by a woman after Culloden and translated - her translation is 'They killed my father and my two brothers. They even stripped and raped my mother. And yet, if only Charles had prospered, the pain would be less.'

Now. 'Mharbh iad m' athar 's mo dhà bhràthar, mhill iad mo chineadh, chreach iad mo chàirdean, sgrios iad mo dhùthaich' - 'They decimated my country and my kinsfolk.' And I think, I said now that was yes over 200 years ago. But it remains with us in that song. And unless we can apply that absolute recognition of the state of



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humanity and it still goes on - it still goes on! - we may never understand what it's like. But the songs express it so amazingly.

And so that was 1746. But it's a very complicated story and, for some, those who were Jacobites, those who were captured, they had to renounce that, they had to swear allegiance to the King, which a lot of Americans say: 'Well how come you get all these Scots people fighting for the loyalists in America?' And you know etcetera. And well, if you had a choice on the boat some of them changed from being Jacobites to - not Hanoverians - but they had to swear allegiance or they were going to be executed! And then there were others who changed from being Catholic to Protestant simply to save their lives.

DG: To save their lives.

MB: Yes. But it's very complex! And as far as immigration goes a lot went to the Carolinas and to the South, but they weren't welcome in the South after the American Revolution so after that, from 1776 onwards, the immigration is really into Canada - and Australia of course - and so Cape Breton becomes the destination then.

DG: Because one of the songs that I sing - Tha Mi Sgith 'n Fhògar Seo - composed by John MacRae from Kintail, that is a question that sprung to my mind. How did he end up fighting in North Carolina? And I often wondered, I don't understand how this has come about.

MB: And likewise, Flora Macdonald's husband and sons, they all fought for the loyalists. And that's a rather curious one as well because Flora's family were Hanoverians, but...

DG: But she helped...

MB: ...in her heart... She had to sort of acknowledge the clan loyalty which was to the King. But in her heart she felt like so many others that this can't be right. That just to avoid having a Catholic King we have a German, protestant yes, he doesn't speak English far less Gaelic and he doesn't understand and... And our whole culture will be destroyed and they felt it was wrong that they should have this change of the lineage etcetera just for the sake of... and I mean it's very complicated; pits brothers against brothers. John MacRae, yes from Kintail, but he soon realises: 'Oh my word how deceived I was!'

--interval--

MB: Yes, it's like the banning of the Tartan! The Campbells of Argyll who were of Breadalbane, they fought for the King. Ah! But wait a minute. They too were banned from wearing Tartan. The whole - everybody was banned! - unless they were going to be fighting in the army, the British army will adopt that dress, they are going to adopt the dress and take... What was the skill of the Highland clansman? It was the skill of combat. And what were his qualities? Loyalty until death. That's the ones you want to fight for us. Loyalty until death. So that when you get the siege of Quebec, and General Wolfe, who by the way fought at Culloden as a young officer.

DG: Oh wow!

MB: Yes. He fought and had in his, among his troops, were Highlanders. And he took note - in his journal! - how he had never seen such bravery on either side. Jacobite or Hano... And he took note that if ever he was promoted to being a General he would have Highland soldiers fight for him. And so at the Siege of Quebec, on the cliffs of Abraham, which is the most horrendously dangerous, he writes in his diary: 'We'll send in the Highlanders. What mischief if they fall.' Such great pleasure in having the enemy on your side. He had no liking for them.

DG: No.



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MB: And yet our school history books glorified General Wolfe.

DG: Of course they did. Is that the great quote: 'No great mischief?'

MB: That's right!

DG: That's where that comes from.

MB: 'What great mischief if they fall.' It doesn't matter, I mean you can send hundreds of them! And I'm afraid - if I might apply a modern application to it. When Bush and Blair agreed that we should invade Iraq... who did they send in? 800 Blackwatch soldiers. First in.

DG: Always first in.

MB: Yes! So in a way it's thinly disguised, I'm not saying that out of resentment, but the reality is that we have to really look at how the Highlander has been treated, not just in the past, and how- and what the plight was when they were all cleared. And that it went on, not just for decades, but it went on really until the end of nineteenth century there were clearances, waves of them, for different reasons.

When the new regime, when the clan system fell and there was no longer any hereditary right to own land. And when those that were Jacobites lost their land, it was given over - some to Lowland, huge sheep farmers or estate workers, friendships were very important - it's who you know! And ruthlessly they thought nothing of clearing people. You mentioned the Duke of Sutherland yourself. Oh my word! And somehow when you read, it says that... The man, the right hand man if you, like, Patrick Seller.

DG: Patrick Seller.

MB: Wow! Burning houses, elderly people then being dragged out.

DG: I read a quotation in Anne Lorne Gillies' book *Songs of Gaelic Scotland*...

MB: Yes.

DG: I believe it might have been Alexander MacKenzie who wrote on it. Saying that, he witnessed, I think, an elderly woman up to the age of 100 in her bed and they were pleading 'Don't burn the house, we need to get her out.' And they said 'Let the woman burn.'

MB: Yes that's right! And women in labour, I'm reading a transcription of a recording made in 1978, from a Donald Beaton recorded in Skye, and his people had gone through these terrible clearances. And he said: 'Well,' he says. 'It was a brutal kind of work. When you think of the poor people, how they suffered. Putting them out of their houses. Putting houses on fire in case they'd go back when they had nowhere to go. It was disgraceful. When I think of what they suffered, I don't think any other body or country in this world suffered the likes of it! Without warning they'd come into your house. Get out of here! They'd put a match to your house. They burned everything. Everything. Everything! Where were they going to go? Well they were sent abroad and the ones that wasn't sent abroad, they were lying out in the open. They were allowed to die in the open! Women crying.

One woman died in childbirth and the man begged the factor to leave her, she was going to have a child! But he wouldn't, he put her out. She gave birth to a baby in a wood. Of course the baby died and she herself died. And there was another woman, close to a hundred. Mrs. Chisholm, yes. And she was burnt to death! And when the factor told that she was in the house, they were waiting for her and the factor said 'Put a match to it,' and this is it. 'It's high time the old bitch was dead.'

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They were merciless! Merciless. That book is heartbreaking reading.

DG: I think then when you understand or have a glimpse into these stories, and not just the one instance but so many, like you say, waves of immigration but waves of brutality...

MB: Brutality.

DG: You really get that sense of pain coming through in the songs.

MB: You do. And in fact there's a little film of this man, a man I met in Mull. Actually you may know his niece who is a lovely singer, Janet MacDonald or Janet Tandy,

DG: Mhm.

MB: Lovely singer, you'll probably meet her at the Mòd. Well her uncle Angus Henderson was the blacksmith, and he had listened to the stories of his grandparents, how they were cleared from an area of Ardnamurchan. Oh, that was another terrible clearance. And how areas of Mull, horrendous treatment! And he said to the man who was interviewing, and he had a, there was a film cameraman who was with him, he said 'I'll take you to the grave of the factor', and he named him. And they stand over his grave and he said 'That's where he's buried. And if anything more that nettles grow on his grave I'll tear them out with my own bare hands for what he did to us.'

DG: Wow.

MB: And that was recorded in 1978.

DG: Oh really!

MB: Yes. Yes. But he was talking about a hundred years previously maybe, or a little more, but the memory lies because the whole social order changed. I think it's probably changing so rapidly now that it'll fade if we don't keep it alive. But we don't want to keep it alive for resentment. We want to keep it alive because... well, politicians don't read history. They don't.

DG: No. They make it.

MB: They don't. They make decisions. Or, they don't seem to read history.

--interval--

MB: We think of Ireland, of the potato famine as Ireland, but Scotland had, if not on such a huge scale, then equal poverty and destitution, and clearances.

DG: So where, at the time of the potato famine then, because I think that's something for myself that I don't know so much about it all because I said that I think immediately of-

MB: Of Ireland.

DG: -of Patrick Seller and the Highland Clearances.

MB: Oh yes!



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DG: But actually the Potato Famine is, to my mind, less documented.

MB: Yes it was. Yes you're absolutely right.

And it's a funny thing: when you go to America and meet lots of Irish immigrants, and there were thousands, they are still very proud of their Irish background and many of them can tell you: my people came during the Famine. And the Famine of course was caused by this potato blight: the greenery came up, but when they lifted them they stank to high heaven of rot. And there was nothing. But this happened, it started, there was an earlier one, but the main one was 1846-56, but they had become so dependent on the potato.

DG: Mhm.

MB: And in fact, in the new land... in some of the new areas they were given an allocation of potatoes - they were so dependent! - that they were starving. Now, they were growing, Ireland was growing crops of oats and wheat, and it was being stripped and exported to England! Without... and people starving in their own land, it was very strange.

DG: Yeah.

MB: In Scotland, the potato famine was probably at its worst on the outer islands.

DG: Okay.

MB: Lewis was terribly badly hit. So was Harris. North Uist and all down the outer islands and it was, if we take, say, Lewis as a case in point.

DG: Yes.

MB: The Island was owned by James Matherson, and he had been a wealthy merchant dealing in tea and opium in the far east.

DG: Okay.

MB: And he brought back a fortune to Scotland and he bought the Island of Lewis in about 1841. And oh he would deal it wherever, he was obviously very good at it. And he was from-

DG: Oh! I have heard that! Because Stornoway, the buildings in Stornoway, a lot of them were built on money from the Opium trade, is that correct?

MB: Some... yes! But he bought the castle for example. But, there was no castle when he bought the island. But he bought it at a pretty bad time because first of all the Poor Law Act came in in 1844. And the Poor Law Act was first of all to protect the poor, and ehm... here he is with an island full of tenants, they had plots of land - the crofts - and a runrig system but they had the right to cultivate, but they had to pay rent. To a landlord. And that's how he made his money, and the rent was levied at a certain level. It seemed very little but it was about to rise. Everywhere. And that's... they were cleared, most of them, they couldn't pay their rent. The Poor Law Act placed an obligation on large landowners that they had to be responsible for the welfare or the well-being of their tenants. Of the tenants who were paying them the rent. So that but, if it wasn't...

But when the crop failed in 1846, they might have... they couldn't sell potatoes. They had to. They were starving. So there was a government scheme actually, government schemes always sound great. Oh they are going to rescue us! We've just been looking at plenty of government schemes the last two years...



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DG: Yes exactly! [laughter]

MB: But this particular one would send boatloads of meal - oatmeal, to the islands, to different - so Stornoway was receiving - and it would be administered by... ehm... James Matherson's factor, whose name was um, John, he was a Mackenzie. And they were given an allocation of meal per family per person in exchange for - there's nothing free, or there wasn't - in exchange for labour. Stornoway Castle was built on famine labour.

DG: Oh my.

MB: All these walls, the estates, some of the manses for the churches, built with masons and workers, stone workers, on famine labour.

And so there was always something in it for the landlord. However this was happening year after year, and people were in arrears in rent, some of them quite considerably. So what happened was the factor decided he would serve them an eviction notice if they didn't pay the arrears of rent.

But of course they couldn't! And they pleaded that they might be able to maybe... But he said that if they didn't pay the rent they would be offered an opportunity! To emigrate! Now the opportunity to emigrate was to Quebec.

DG: Right.

MB: And what would they be offered? Well, it sounds very good on paper. A land grant of fifty acres or sometimes a hundred acres. And it would be close to water and ehm cultural facilities to churches, etc. The reality was this was land that was part of a scheme by the British Government.

A group of businessmen had bought six million acres in a part of Quebec and were selling it off at great profit. But there was a huge area that wasn't fit for anything.

DG: Anything.

MB: It was absolutely tangled bush, brush, and swampy, and it would be as accurate to say they were near facilities as it would be to say that St. Kilda is near the Covent Gardens.

DG: Wow!

MB: It was. They said the woods were teeming with wildlife but they didn't tell them what.

DG: What wildlife it was.

MB: Yes. And some of them, very few of them would you believe, really wanted to go. So he encouraged them by saying, if you don't go, we will forbid you to cut peat.

DG: Oh! So to heat their homes and-

MB: Yes!

DG: And to cook over and everything.



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MB: Yes, yes. And they were reduced to eating shellfish. However, the landlords, as in the same MacKenzie, and in others too, they claimed what they called the Udal Rights. That's when the tide comes out, that's when you pick the wilks as you know.

DG: Yes.

MB: They said that the landlord owned the land all the way to the edge of sea at the low tide. So they were even grudging a few wilks and even the limpets which are as tough as leather. They were reduced to starvation.

DG: It's horrible! There's so many levels in that where at first you're, building the manses and the castle and famine labour, it's so demoralising.

MB: Oh it's dreadful!

DG: And then to be packaged up in this scam, it's lies and then...

MB: Yes exactly. And I will read to you a little quotation from the speech that Sir John Trevelyan, he was the government in charge of this wonderful scheme. Now no one said anything about the land and how they got this land because it was so bad that they couldn't sell it to anybody but the British Government wanted a scheme.

DG: Wow. Of course.

MB: So here's what he said in Parliament. This is 1851: 'Ethnologically the Celtic race is an inferior one. And attempt to disguise it as we may, there is no getting rid of the fact that it is destined to give way to the higher capabilities of the Anglo Saxon.'

And he said that whether the Celt was languishing in rags and idleness in Ireland or in filth in the Hebrides, there was one solution, and he said: 'Emigration to America is the only available remedy for the miseries of this race.' (see MacPherson, 2020)

DG: Oh!

MB: That's what he said about all Celtic people.

DG: It's such a strong propaganda.

MB: Wow. And then, the following year, when he gets the scheme, aided by the way by a Highlander who was in a well-paid position to help him, ehm, he. The following year - and this appeared in the Fife-shire journal, a Fife newspaper - he reported that 'Now we contemplate with satisfaction the prospect of flights of German settling here in Britain in increasing numbers. They're an orderly, moral, industrious, and frugal people. Less foreign to us than the Irish or Scottish Celt.' Sir John Trevelyan, 1852. That's the backdrop to the immigration of the people from the outer islands to Quebec.

And it's a good thing they didn't read it! They were, most of them were monoglot Gaels, yes some went with a minister who could... or a teacher, because... But when they got there and they took. They were given. This was Matheson or the landlord's role was to give them some kind of grant, to he paid... the passage perhaps. But there were schemes where they had to pay it back! Yes!

DG: Oof.

MB: Yes. And there was organisations, they had women knitting. There was an embroidery school in Harris, would you believe! [laughter] And knitting socks, and doing things, and they were going to be sold.



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But when they got there, they had to, well, it took six weeks and the voyages were just... oh my word, oh my word. I recorded several elderly people in Quebec, eh, I was there in 1976 for a year. So if you think... that's only, well, it's about 120 years after the voyage, but some whose grandparents had been on it.

DG: In living memory, then.

MB: Yes. And they had talked about it by the fireside. Interestingly, they didn't dwell on the miseries of what they had left. And this was possibly the best thing possible.

DG: That's an incredible display of their...

MB: Resilience, yes.

DG: ...nature.

MB: It's also maybe an indication of the fact that they had no preparation of what was going to meet them. They were promised a house. When they got there it was a very crudely built log cabin and the snow came in in drifts inside the house.

DG: Of course.

MB: And it goes very very cold in Quebec, oh my word. Twenty below, thirty below, forty below.

DG: Something they'll never have experienced before.

MB: Never. They brought with them woollen blankets, they brought with them very little in the way of tools. Some of them had never seen woodworking tools because Lewis for a start has very few trees.

DG: Yes!

MB: There was a carpenter who built ships so he would be there. There was a miller! And there was a wheelwright among them so they could bring skills with them. And in fact they could quarry stones and create this, they were so resilient, they were crofters, and ehm... I think it's a marvellous testament to the versatility of the crofter. To this day you know you can't depend on the weather forecast. [laughter]

DG: [laughter]

MB: We might laugh but today was a perfect example. It was going to be sunny. Really? Where was it!

DG: [laughter] Yeah!

MB: But they had to adjust and some of the roles changed. But they had incredible songs about it.

DG: So this brings to my mind the song:

O mo dhùthaich 's tu th' air m' aire

MB: Yes! Oh yes!

DG: Which tells the story of...



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MB: Ubhist cùbhraidh ùr nan gallan Yes. And, now they were going on to Manitoba, it was the same wave of immigration.

DG: *Molladh iad dhuinn Manitoba*

MB: Yes. *Molladh iad dhuinn Manitoba* - They praised to us Manitoba, a land without coal or without peat or without anything. And they were hardly prepared for the isolation the snow could bring. You can get six months of that snowy winter in Quebec. When I lived my year there the first snow fell on the 10th of October. And I remember I had hung a washing - this is the novice - I had hung a washing. I had spent eight years in Newfoundland but I hadn't seen anything the likes of this! So I hung the washing out on a nice sunny morning and it started to snow and I thought 'Hmm I'm not going out there to get my washing,' there was ten inches at the end of the day. However, the next day there was a foot.

DG: [laughter]

MB: And the next thing the washing was vanishing! And I saw the pegs peeping up and I never got it until March.

DG: Oh! [laughter]

MB: And thank goodness it wasn't every stitch I owned but only a couple of towels on the line.

But it was rather a measure of what it might have been like for them.

DG: Yes.

MB: And some of them describe, ehm... well they made their furniture pretty crudely. They had to clear trees for- And how they would put the little baby in the cradle under the table with a blanket over it in case the snow would drift onto the little child.

DG: Oh wow!

MB: Yes but soon they learned ways of dealing with it. They were so versatile. The children helped! Even tiny little children could gather moss and fill in the logs. The resilience and the, the spirit. But they never lost the longing, longing, longing for the homeland. And the people who left them, who saw them go. They wondered for a century - what happened to them?

DG: Because of course the communication must have been... if anything, you know...

MB: Yes! Hardly anything!

DG: ...so intermittent and sparse.

MB: That's where you get that wonderfully poignant song that's very, you'll hear it a lot in Nova Scotia and Cape Breton, you'll hear it on the pipes *Fuadach nan Gàidheal*. Composed by Henry White. Now he was born during the potato famine and he composed a song, ehm, after just from listening to the old people talking at the fireside and, gosh how he paints this picture of seeing them go.



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Gura mise tha tùrsach a' caoidh còir na dùthcha

'S na seann daoine cùiseil bha cliùiteach is treun

Rinn fhuachdaireachd am fuadach gur fada null thar chuantan

Am fearainn chaidh thoirt 'uapa 's toirt suas do na fèidh

'How sad I am, lamenting the state of the homeland, the old honest people. Worthy, courageous. Landlords evicted them. Far overseas. The lands were taken from them, and given up to the deer.'

The deer came soon after the sheep, you see, when these great new landlords discovered that - what a fantastic playground, sportsground we're living in! And as one, actually an old man I recorded in Newfoundland said to me: 'My people on the Isle of Canna, and in Moidart, couldn't shoot a deer but they would go to prison.'

DG: Wow.

MB: Which is right. They couldn't take a salmon but it was against the law. And that was right. But the great thing about the new country was, we had freedom for that. We could kill the deer and fish for the salmon and have a plentiful supply for food. Quebec was slightly more difficult because, every time they were using bows and arrows, not by the way learned from the Native peoples although they did befriend them and they were very helpful to them in teaching them a lot of skills. But the Hebrideans were very skilled in archery, very skilled in archery.

DG: Hmm.

MB: So they had the skill.

DG: You hear that in a lot of the praise songs, don't you?

MB: Yes! Yes!

DG: With the *claidheamh* and the bow and arrow and the...

MB: Yes that's right.

DG: ...Certainly in the praise the clan chief songs.

MB: That's right. So they had the skill and, but what they didn't realise is that when they shot a deer, which was easy, there was plenty... they couldn't even get to it but the wolves were in tearing it apart. So they had to clear land and wait til they got land.

The land they got by the way, their hundred acres, was covered in thick dense forest. With maybe two or three metres from the house was cleared. And the little small house measuring sixteen feet by twelve - that was the house! Ehm, so it was very different from what they thought they were going to...

DG: Absolutely. If I can step back a moment...

MB: Yes.



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DG: You were talking about the deer and how people weren't allowed to shoot the deer in the wrong class. Ehm, that brings to mind another song that I'm fond of and I sing: '*S Gann Gun Dirich Mi Chaoidh*. When of course the *Tormod Óg MacNeacaill*, or *Fear Óg Sgoirebreac* was prohibited from, from hunting on the land and fishing in the rivers again. And his song is a protest of the new policies that were being brought in. Would that probably have been the same time, then?

MB: Oh yes, absolutely! And it lasts until our present day. If you or I wanted to shoot a deer - say we were inclined, or your parents - well, you would face a prosecution for poaching deer, or salmon, ehm, because it's ever been so that these have been the huge sportsgrounds. They're thousands of acres! Ehm, Hamish Henderson's song, which is in Scots actually, *The Men of Knoydart* there's this dialogue between Lord Brocket who owns the estate - and after World War II by the way! -

DG: Uh huh.

MB: - and he wouldn't allow returning soldiers to plant a row of potatoes.

DG: Wow, it's callous.

MB: He says 'Ye Highland swines, these hills are mine, this is all Lord Brocket's land. You're bloody red, Lord Brocket said, what's this you're doing here?' I mean he, because he, we'll leave that one aside.

But the deer, no they weren't allowed. But the deer had a second, terrible effect on the crofter. First of all they've been squeezed onto smaller wee strips of land, there are plenty of accounts on Skye near your own family's home and plenty of crofts surrounding you, where families - where once there had been one croft, there were then four. Or six. Or eight. So they were tiny pieces of land and they were usually a strip of the shore, because that freed up far more for these beautiful estates for the deer, and they could have... they could have a shooting season and a stag season, etc. And they could bring in a lot of money because they could invite wealthy sportsmen! To pay the shooting. And they could hire the local, skilled, healthy lads to be the stalkers. To carry the gear. To handle the ponies. Grealoch what they shot and maybe... etc, etc. And there was plenty meat left over for their dogs.

DG: Ooft.

MB: That still happens.

DG: Yeah.

MB: That still happens. But if you - I was looking at the Napier Commission, which was finally the Government inquiry, if you like, in 1882 which was going to actually finally ask the crofters, and a lot of them said: Well, they don't have fencing around their little piece of land. And the deer come and they eat their newly planted corn. So they've only got an acre of crops and the deer come, and so he said some of them have got people watching the whole night long. So they would allow them to - because the deer would just gobble up that. Not satisfied with their own thousands of acres of grazing. And so that made it even more difficult for the crofter to have even sustenance for his own family!

DG: Would some of those crofters then have quite gladly chosen to emigrate, given those circumstances then?

MB: The younger ones tended to. And especially young men who, say in a family of half a dozen, well how are they going to divide that little piece of land among say three or four brothers? So if there was an opportunity of leaving, and some of them a whole shipload were willing to go, they were young, thinking: 'Well maybe I can make a living here, I can send money back home!' Which was a big Irish thing - I'll make living, I'll get rich. The streets of New York are lined with gold. Yeah right!



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DG: [laughter]

MB: I'll send money home. And they would hope to send money home. To just even help. Ehm and so they would go out of a spirit of adventure. And some of them yes they did okay and they got land grants and they were very very hardworking, there was no point in going if you weren't. Um. So the ones that went, say, in the early eighteen hundreds, they tended to have gone willingly. And the ones-

DG: Because I think *Fear Òg MacNeacail* going in '*S Gann Gun Dirich Mi Chaoidh*...

MB: '*S Gann Gun Dirich Mi Chaoidh* Sing a whole verse of it, go on, it's so lovely!

DG: Aww.

'S gann gun dirich mi chaoidh

Dh' ionnsaigh frìth àrd a mhonaidh

'S gann gun dirich mi chaoidh

'S iomadh latha sgìth a bha mi

Nam shuidhe leis 's e làn air tulaich

'S gann gun dirich mi chaoidh

Dh' ionnsaigh frìth àrd a mhonaidh

'S gann gun dirich mi chaoidh

And of course he's reflecting on not being able to use his gun. And by the end of that song he says 'I'm going to make my way.'

MB: Yes. There's no point. That's right. And even well this is a bit earlier, Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir he sort of emigrated in a way; went to Edinburgh, and joined, they were looking for - they'll be known as policemen now - they needed two types of labour in Edinburgh, this was the 1780s. Well, no, 1760s, after Culloden. They needed - well, if they were going to be cleared, they could no longer live on the land the way they did. And he had a song to his gun, because the gun...

DG: Yes!

MB: Yes, he would be stalking the deer and he was in the employment of your like of Campbell of Breadalbane, well he went to Edinburgh, and they were looking for people to join the Guard, the policemen, and Edinburgh is full of hills, and they needed sedan chair carriers.

DG: What?

MB: Yes. Sedan chair carriers.

DG: Oh my goodness.



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MB: Yes and because the Highlanders are used to climbing hills and can run up and down the hills with a load like a stag, and help them. They're strong, they can manage the hills, they're designed to climb hills. Well there's plenty of hills in Edinburgh. Well why would they need sedan chairs? I think they brought back sedans actually, only there are more bicycle sedans now in Edinburgh.

DG: Yes, yes, yes!

MB: But for example, say a university professor or a lawyer or a solicitor needed to get from say the Advocates Library to the Courthouse - that's a bit close maybe - but they needed to get from the new Divinity College to the other one, the Old College, in a short space of time. There would be a sedan chair, or sedan chair carriers waiting. He would hop aboard the sedan and they would rush him off to where he was going. And he wouldn't arrive breathless and in a sweat.

DG: Of course.

MB: He would then do whatever the business. But people, of course Donnchadh Bàn, that's another subject altogether...

DG: [laughter]

MB: He and his wife were, they cut quite the figure. She made whisky.

DG: Oh wow!

MB: [laughter] Yes, in the cowgate. When she was confronted she said 'It's only for our own use!'

DG: [laughter]

MB: Yes, there we go. Anyway, where were we? The deer!

DG: The deer.

MB: The deer, yes. The situation with the deer wasn't going to change. They weren't going to say 'Alright we'll give you a piece of our big estate and take the deer off and we'll fence them. That wasn't going to happen. And um, they were just destitute. And there's reports of them arriving in Quebec in the most awful state.

Now before they could actually go to the land allocated to them they had to, they had to if you like, check in like a medical check, and they stopped on a little island in the ehm, they would sail up the gulf of Saint Lawrence, there's a little island called Grosse-Île,

DG: I've heard of this.

MB: And it was a quarantine island, yes, a quarantine island and if they saw, you see if there was fever aboard, like typhoid, they had to raise a yellow flag. And if there was a yellow flag aboard they had to stay on board the ship until they had an all-clear, and a lot of them nearly died there. There's about seventeen thousand immigrants buried on Grosse-Île, Scots and Irish-

DG: Seventeen thousand!

MB: Seventeen thousand, yes. Ehm and some priests died there too administering, they were just so absolutely totally - they were saints, really,



DG: Yeah.

MB: Offering to help. And then, if they had an all-clear in the quarantine area, they were then put ashore in Laval, Quebec, near Montreal, and they were - or Quebec City - and they would take the train to wherever they were, the main station, and they would be met there. And the ones that got this awful land I told you about, they were shown the land grant and ehm, oh gosh me what a disappointment.

So actually when they talked about their emigration, they had plenty of trauma from the minute they left on the ship, the quarantine, the awful things that happened, the storms. Their songs rather changed! Into songs about the voyage.

DG: Yeah!

MB: And there's one *Gura Bòidheach am Bàta*. They can describe the ship, or even *Illean Bitheabh Sùndach* which is one of them.

DG: Yes!

MB: And sometimes you hear that song very fast now, but it was really one to encourage, it was one to lift the spirits. There's nothing worse than when you're in a bad situation than to keep talking about your miseries.

DG: Yes.

MB: Come on boys, we're not going to think about this. You've got to try and keep cheerful!

DG: Would you sing a piece for us?

MB: *Illean bithibh sùndach a-null air a bhòidse*

'S mi fàgail ar dùthcha 's gun dùil ri tilleadh beò innt'

Illean bithibh sùndach a -null air a bhòidse

And then it goes on - and, actually I can give you a recording if you want,

DG: Oh I'd love that!

MB: Of an old man I recorded singing that with his sons at the table, and they turned into into a milling or a waulking song.

DG: Well I've only ever known it as *Illean bithibh sùndach a-null air a bhòidse*

MB: Yes.

DG: Like really upbeat!

MB: Which sounds very jaunty.

DG: Yes!



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MB: Almost too jaunty, too jolly for what they went through. And he had a song, oh gosh me, he talks about the new macks they got at Greenock and, it takes a fine sailor to, you know these kinds of things. And there's another verse where he said that, when they were really in the teeth of a gale, he prayed to the Lord that they would... And he thought of it, he said, I thought of my mother and my sweetheart. In other words they are all the lads together on the ship and suddenly it's so dangerous and they think: 'Oh my mother, that'll break her heart.' Or 'What about my sweetheart, will I ever see her again.' Because usually the plan was she'd come later and they'd marry.

DG: Oh of course!

MB: They didn't necessarily take the sweethearts with them.

DG: Which is just another layer of heartbreak.

MB: Yes, isn't it! It is another layer of heartbreak, yes, these partings. And then there was always the thought, you know, is someone else going to go off with her. I mean that's putting it very bluntly.

DG: Yes!

MB: But uh, all these emotional things, that's what makes our songs so... I think that to sing them, my mother used to have a phrase: you have to get inside your song. And then when you do that, you really have to think, imagine you were on that boat, imagine your people had been cleared off, imagine your wife had been thrown out of the house when she's about to go into labour.

DG: Oof.

MB: Yes.

--interval--

MB: I realise when you asked me did some go willingly, and they did, and also a lot of them at the end of the day when asked, and I've asked this question. How do you feel now about the immigration? And they nearly all say, well, they did have a better life.

DG: Really.

MB: Yes. The first generation of course had the hardest, there was one family I recorded, and I can actually give you the sound of his voice. His name was Angus Morrison from Harris, and his mother was a girl of thirteen, slightly later than the famine, but they had fallen in arrears with the rent, and there was a lot of them being cleared from Harris, well into the 1880s, and they had very little choice and they had to sell their cow and their little boat they had, they had to sell that to pay for the food they had on the passage.

DG: Wow.

MB: And um, the... Oh, my word. She describes it. And I - oh my word. She can describe the boat as well, as with some ladies, she was born in 1876 and I recorded her in 1976, so I said to her the experience didn't kill her because she lived to a hundred and seven.

DG: Ooft!

MB: But she described what it was like and the hardships - Oh, she said, my mother cried every day for Harris, she cried every day. And my grandfather he was with us, he was an old man when he emigrated, and he said but.



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They had people there, they were a very close knit community and they, they were used to having a community where people helped one another. They'd cut peat together, they'd harvest it together. Well they did the same in Quebec. And when they were building a house they had what they'd call a, they would have a, they called it a 'Bee', so they would raise the timbers together, they would put the roof on together. They were a very close knit - but oh, my.

DG: How would that then play into the integration of communities that were there already? Because I think they became very well integrated.

MB: Yes they did, they did. There was a certain - actually the French Canadians, there wasn't a lot of French in that area although later on they started coming in saying 'Well, Quebec is French so.' But they forget that that land was cleared by the Scots, the history in that area is now kept alive by young French Canadians - well, not so young now - because they recognise that the land was, the farms were carved out by Gaelic-speaking Highland settlers. And they did ehm, learn from the native people say were the Abernacwie, and they taught them how to make snowshoes and how to track down a moose and how to kill it, etc. And how to sustain - they could tan leather already but they learned all this. There was respect, when one old man I spoke to said that 'You know they used to say that maybe there was witches among them, so that if they asked you to give them, lend your horse you would just lend your horse.'

DG: [laughter] Yeah.

MB: But that's not any different to what there was here. I've recorded people here in Skye who said 'So and so...' - and in Tiree! - mention of witchcraft, it was part of their culture, they didn't actually think this was strange. There was gradual intermarriage with the French. For the Lewis and Harris people it was quite cautious to begin with because all the French were Catholic and all the immigrants from the outer islands - well, really they were Presbyterians but more or less like the Free Church.

DG: Uh huh.

MB: Slight variation, they called themselves Presbyterians. But then they said you know they have their ways and we have ours, but they did intermarry and there was a great kinship between them. There was more in common than people imagined. And they described how they would - yes, they began to learn the language - a lot of them became fluent in French. They had no idea that it wouldn't be English that would take over their language, it would be French, and you could...

I've got a recording of a man and he starts off: 'Je suis Kenneth MacIvor, mes parents sont venus ici de l'Île de Lewis, eh?' And he tells the whole thing in French.

DG: Wow! That's incredible!

[archive recording; V1=voice 1, V2=voice 2]

V1: Bon... mes parents sont, étaient... sont venus en monde, de l'Île d'Lewis, dans les Îles Hébrides dans l'Nord l'Ecosse. [inaudible]

V2: Et en metier?

V1: Et... Après ça le gouvernement m'a donné...

[English translation]



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V1: Okay... my parents did, they were... they came as a part of a group from the Isle of Lewis, which is in the Hebridean Islands in the North of Scotland.

V2: And what did they do?

V1: Well... after that the government gave me...

[End of archive recording]

MB: Let's get back to the songs. How did they integrate and how did they feel? I think that one man, one of the bards in Cape Breton more or less summed it up for a lot of them. He said that yes they missed aspects of their beloved land and they tried to keep the cèilidhs going. And certainly they've done well in Cape Breton!

DG: Mhm.

MB: And they really have, the old songs and the dances and the fiddle tunes. But he says *Àite B' Fheàrr Dhomh Dùbailte*, it's a place that's better for me. Twice as good for me. In other words there's a generous spirit of the terms on which they settled. And they had land that was not restricted, they could go to the rivers and they could fish. They worked with a - oh! The most incredible, hard, hard work, pulling together with their neighbours. And... lovely descriptions too of the French and the Gaels putting the roof on a house or a barn together. And then the French taught them how to make maple syrup and maple sugar.

DG: Oh wow!

MB: The French taught them how to log! They didn't know how to cut timber. So they did learn a lot from each other. And uhm... they could earn a little extra money by going to the lumber camps. There's quite a few songs about that. There's a few Macaronic songs, too. Yes.

DG: Would you have any to mind?

MB: Gosh! Well I'm going to... I'm going to hop over to Newfoundland for one of the Macaronic ones.

DG: Okay!

MB: There was a... actually I recorded this from an old... an old French lady. Whose... Her people had intermarried with the Scots, and um...

[singing]

Je vais vous chanter une chanson, une chanson menterie.

N'a pas paroles de vérité, je veux pas de ma vie.

A rum fo taddle i ainm, a rum fo taddle i ei [sp]

And rum four times a day!

DG: [laughter]

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MB: And so they would all laugh together, they loved to have fun. They recognised that wisdom, and actually now, it's psychologically essential, that we have some time to restore our minds, our bodies, our souls, it must have been all work, but to sing together. Singing is good for you.

DG: It's so good for you.

MB: Yes, isn't it! And so this singing together... I mean we talk now, you're a performing, professional musician, and you always talk about the, if you like, the setlist.

DG: Mhm.

MB: And... you don't want six real downers in a row. So they had this idea of: somebody would come in. And they loved the songs of the old country and the ones of the new, the ones of the new I mean. The bard MacLean from Tiree who emigrated and he wrote that song *Coille Ghruamach* and oh dear me, it's very gloomy, gloomy, gloomy. However he sustains himself through verse after verse after verse of this gloominess, but then there's a wee flicker of hope and you think 'Oh mercy me!' And he does stay, eh, so it's a... But a lot of us say, you know, we must look at the best this land has given to us. Ehm, and of the Gaelic Macaronic songs, oh this is a funny one, an odd one.

A' chaillin dhuinn bhon dh'fhàg mi thu mi

Not at all and fun with you

Chaidh mi chall don [inaudible]

And that's the way it used to be.

You were bonny, you were bright,

You were handsome and polite

You were so very nice,

I don't intend to marry you

A' chaillin dhuinn bhon dh'fhàg mi thu mi

Not at all and fun with you

It's got that Scotch Snap.

DG: Yeah!

MB: And that real strathspey. And they retained the strathspey, which didn't have... When we were at school a strathspey was much more elongated.

[singing]

DG: Very kind of East Coast style of strathspey.

MB: They'd never heard that.



DG: Mm!

MB: They had the: [singing] And you can see the step dance strathspey.

DG: Yes!

MB: I played a recording of a beautiful playing of Ron Ginelles playing a strathspey, and the fellow said ‘My heavens you’d have to be airborne to dance to that!’

DG: [laughter]

MB: Because they were used to this very close to the floor, solo dance a strathspey, or it could be in pairs of whatever. Set dancing. And much lighter, because they weren’t bound by what had actually been an Italian influence in the Scottish style of fiddle music.

DG: Ah!

MB: We’re going all over the place here!

DG: We are but it’s fascinating!

MB: But it’s such a fertile area for a whole field of wildflowers to grow up in the glorious blossom that creates the picture, the little bits are...

DG: It’s so nice to hear these songs that are lighter and fuller of - fuller? - full of hope now, after such a difficult time.

MB: Oh yes.

DG: And after that integration and a community spirit and for that ehm, for that hope to start shining through. It’s lovely.

--interval--

MB: How did they feel generations afterwards? Well the woman who left Harris at 13 and remembered her mother crying every day. She too, at a hundred, longed for the homeland, she would never see it. And that nostalgia was passed on to the next generation; her son Angus who was born, he was the same age as my father, 1917 he was born, and he said that we was determined that he would work hard, he would earn his fare and he and his wife, French Canadian wife, Catholic, which is a lovely combination. And she, they were wonderful, a great team. He would take her to the Isle of Harris and he had never been either, and the very community - ‘There were so many Morrisons!’ he said. The taxi driver was a Morrison, the hotelier was a Morrison. And Geocrab he said was the name of the place his mother left and cried and her grandmother heartbroken. And he said to me: ‘Geocrab! Have you ever seen it?’ he said, ‘A sheep couldn’t have made a living there!’

DG: Oh! [laughter]

MB: And he said it cured his nostalgia in a one-r.

DG: [laughter]



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MB: But he loved Harris and he loved the language, he was one of the last speakers. He spoke it til, well he died at 92.

But he... yes he realised that there was a reason. But it was the way it was done. It was the cruelty of the way it was done. And what they put them through to do it.

DG: Yep, absolutely. Well Margaret thank you so so much.

MB: Oh gosh I don't know if I...

DG: Oh, no...

MB: I've been hopping around like a grasshopper!

DG: But I think this subject, you can't go in a linear line with this.

MB: [laughter]

DG: There are so many different accounts and different experiences that come into play. And, I think what you've given me is such an amazing amount of knowledge.

MB: A bit of a *brochan*!

DG: [laughter] A *brochan*! But what I love, and if I can, quote from yourself to finish off Margaret, when you spoke at the... at the 286th anniversary of Culloden, for the Gaelic Society of Inverness was it?

MB: Yes it was.

DG: And you gave a speech there and you were talking about Culloden but what you said there was:

"Culloden cast a huge shadow on all our people right across the world. But as I reminded myself earlier, where there is a shadow, there is also light. You cannot have a shadow without light. And we can walk in that light."

MB: That's a nice way to end!

DG: It's beautiful, yes!

[unidentified male voice says something inaudible]

MB: [laughter]

DG: But what I think is beautiful about that is, what we've spoken about today, has come from quite a gloomy place, on a journey, and we have come into some light where we've got some sort of hope and reconciliation by the end of it.

MB: Well I think so. I think that's... when I look at today's world, they need the same kind of path.

DG: Yeah!

DG: Mòran mòran mòran taing



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MB: Oh 's e do bheatha

DG: It's just been a treat to see you today as well. Thank you so much.

DG: My heartfelt thanks again to Margaret Bennett for bringing alive the voice of the Gael through these songs and stories. I hope that you enjoyed our conversation - if so, please remember to like, share, review and subscribe to this podcast.

The music you hear in the background is taken from my album, *Urranta*, which is available through my website www.deirdregraham.com as well as on the usual streaming platforms.

Before I go I'd like to extend my grateful thanks to Creative Scotland for supporting this project.

I look forward to sharing more Gaelic Song Stories with you and I hope that you'll join me the next time.

Chun an uairsin, beannachd leibh!

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