

CAPTAIN DONALD MACKINNON OF THE *TAEPING*

As many people know, Angus and I have been researching Captain Donald Mackinnon of the *Taeping* for some time. We have managed, with a great deal of assistance, to collect some very interesting information on his life, career and family. It has been an exciting journey taking us to Canada, USA, South Africa and Australia. There are so many people to thank for their kindness and generosity that we must leave this very long list until the small book is published. For those of you that may not know this famous Tìree son, a brief outline follows.

Donald Mackinnon was born in Heanish during the 1820's but left at an early age for a life at sea, he was a *natural*. He became a Master Mariner at the age of 23 and took command of his first ship. He was well known and highly respected throughout the many ports of the world and especially on the Clyde where he made his home for a number of years. One of his greatest achievements was becoming Master of the newly built Tea Clipper *Taeping* in 1863.

During the 1850 and 60's tea was the ultimate commodity and made wealthy men of many a ship owner and tea merchant. Such was the demand that in 1856 the London tea brokers offered a premium £1.00 per ton to the first ship of the season to unload her cargo of tea at the London dock. *Speed was the name of the game...and the race was on!* The annual race took the ships from the port of Foo Chow, China, down the coast and into the South China Sea, through Indonesia to the straits of Java, across the Indian Ocean, around the Cape of Good Hope, then on to St. Helena and Ascension, north to Lizard's Point and at last, up the Channel and home to the docks of London. The race captured the interest of all, young and old, rich and poor; the newspapers were keen to print any and all news of the tea clippers during the race and of course the final outcome!

In May 1866 nine of the most glorious tea clippers gathered at Pagoda Anchorage, at Foo Chow to await their cargo, the first of the season's tea. It was a long and difficult voyage but ultimately the race was between two of the

most celebrated master mariners of the day: Captain Donald Mackinnon, of the *Taeping* and Captain John Keay, of the *Ariel* (a very close 3rd was Captain Innes, of the *Serica*). It was a time of great pride for Scotland; all three Captains were Scots and all 3 ships were built in Greenock! After a distance of 16,000 miles and over 3 months at sea, *Taeping* with her skilled Captain and crew won this prestigious race by docking *20 minutes* prior to her closest rival the *Ariel*. All three tea clippers arrived on the same tide, which was an incredible feat of nautical skill and to this day it has never been matched. The race has long since been known as *The Great Tea Race of 1866*.

On the evening of May 12th 2012, we plan to honour Captain Donald Mackinnon with a talk at *An Talla* - our guest speakers will be Lloyd Pitcher and Angus MacKinnon. Lloyd and his wife Robin are from, Vincentia, New South Wales (just south of Sydney). Lloyd has recently retired from a lifelong career of teaching from primary to a college level. Among his many hobbies is a great interest in his family history and his connection to Captain Donald MacKinnon, which is by marriage. Captain MacKinnon married a Margaret Anne Murray in 1855. Margaret had two brothers who emigrated to Australia, Archibald and Hugh Murray. Lloyd is the great grandson of Archibald Murray. Lloyd brings with him an extensive knowledge of the Captain, his career and family.

Also joining us are Angus and Frances MacKinnon of Troon, Ayrshire. Angus's ancestry takes him back to Barra, Benbecula and Eriskay and being of mariners blood, he has had a lifelong interest in the sea and shipping. It was while doing research into Greenock Shipbuilders Robert Steel & Sons that he became interested in Tea Clippers, The Great Race of 1866 and specifically Captain Donald MacKinnon. Angus has been researching Captain MacKinnon since 1994.

It is shaping up to be a *very* interesting event and we do hope that you can join us at *An Talla* May 12, 2012. Please look for additional information in future issues of *An Tirisdeach* Mary and Angus MacLean.