

Pilgrimage to Iona Abbey from Kilsyth, Scotland in May, 1976.



A Poem

by James Nicoll Kerr Henderson MA, and his son, John.

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James and John report

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The way was long, the hour was five,
The morn had not yet come alive.
A gentle rain prevailed around,
As they set out, Iona bound.

Their 'rendez-vous' was Station Road,
Five limousines each with their load
Of pilgrims full of expectation,
Good fellowship ... some trepidation!

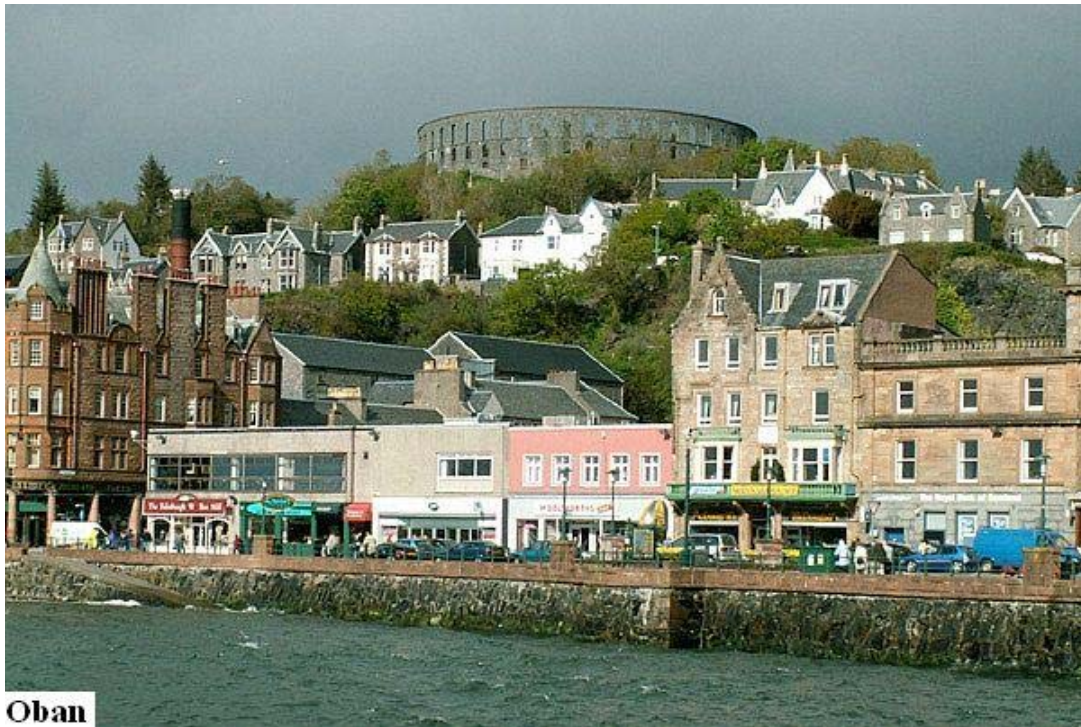
For most, 'alarms' had functioned well,
Though some came late one has to tell;
But after such enforced delay,
They all at last got on their way.

First stop? Tyndrum was the choice;
A sleepy lot though in good voice,
While drivers kept in convoy well,
For no one sought to race pell-mell.



Together Tyndrum they all made.
'Cuppas' drunk and 'visits' paid.
Though Oban yet long miles away,
Dreich drizzly rain brought no dismay.

By ten to eight they spied 'The Arran'.
Through misk and murk a prospect barren.
Then slipped and slithered o'er the pier,
With optimism ... tinged with fear.

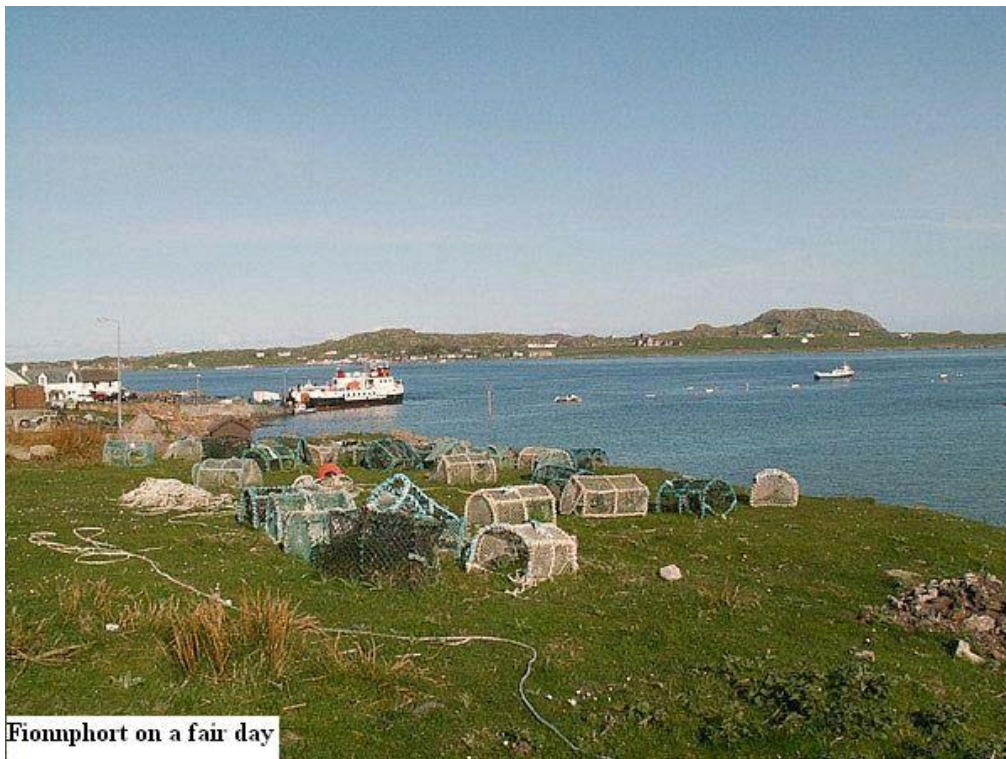


Foul winds and showers made them frown.
The ship heaved up and then dipped down.
Craignure was reached despite the swell.
Next stage's bus was there as well.



Duart Castle - Craignure

Through rain-drenched Mull without a spill,
They bumped and lurched and felt some chill.
Then dropped off mail and milk and bread,
As Fionnphort's pier showed up ahead.



Fionnphort on a fair day

The high seas were a fearsome sight!
Had others weathered such a plight?
Boats in the Sound .. all were tossing,
And them yet to tackle their next crossing.

A craft then docked, packed full of folk;
Who'd won back there, amidst the soak!
Sea-water-stained all looked wary.
Crossing that Sound looked really scary!

The tempest on-and-on blind-raged
As all survival chances gauged.
"What's this? The boat has gone back empty?
Are we marooned? Its crew had plenty?"

"What happens next?" Some joked and laughed.
"Why not get busy ... build a raft?"
Then suddenly there was a shout,
"The boat has turned without a doubt."

'Twas their turn then, the prospect grim.
Verily they might sink and swim;
Thus lashed by waves and drenched in spray,
Each weighed the odds in some dismay.

They beat that storm, made land O.K.
"Wild Iona on the First of May?"
Their kindly hosts met on the pier
Raised up spirits, smiled at past fear.



Dried out they soon sat down to lunch,
A motley garbed kenspeckle bunch.
The meal was great being home-made food.
The egg and chips especially good!

The Warden then gave each a 'chore';
Such as to brush then mop the floor.
Order in life was set just so ...
Collegiality in full flow.

The Abbey shop most did explore;
Souvenirs, historic lore
They studied pamphlets, postcards, maps ...
Nearby sites to visit perhaps?

By tea more pilgrims had come to stay
To share the isle's community way.
"Grand to be here" was a constant theme.
"Fellowship's growth that matches our dream."

The weather later turned benign.
Of erstwhile tantrums ne'er a sign.
Iona Sound glassy as a pond ...
Calmed by Columba's mystic wand?

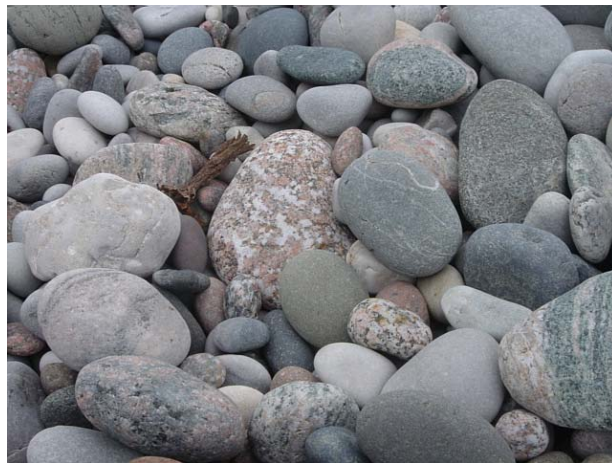


Calm Iona Beach

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James reflects

The Abbey itself dating back through the years
Tells a wonderful story of blood, sweat and tears.
Now inspired by Lord Fuinary's, "We shall rebuild,
By working and praying," all is fulfilled.
A noble cathedral with cloisters and bell,
Refectory, chapter House, bedrooms as well,
And a common room hosting a fellowship rare,
As all rank abandoned, folks foregather there.
To worship therein gives a glorious feeling.
No wonder the monks felt obliged to pray kneeling.
Each stone breathes eternal and infinite power
O'er us - puny mortals - who live in this hour.
The island itself offers more inspiration
To pilgrims who come here from so many a nation.
As the Saint's steps they trace and look out o'er the Sound
It seems fitting, somehow, to feel that white doves are around.

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James and John conclude



Alas, there were limits to glimpses like this -
Of peace all-pervading and sweet earthly bliss.
The world of reality all still had to face
With its challenging struggles and increasing pace.
So they said their farewells and prepared to set sail,
To return to the grind that awaits without fail.
But inspired by the experience their way forward was plain,
To care for, and share with, nor feel such is in vain.