

Raasay is a wonderful type of place to work. It is small and sea-contained...

[Maclean writing to his brother Sorley MacLean, 1945]



Churchton / An Clachan



Family portrait of Malcolm and Peggy MacLean, along with a young Calum, c. 1920.
• Courtesy of the MacLean family.

HOMeward BOUND: RETURN TO RAASAY (1945–1946)

Maclean undertook a pilot fieldwork project from his home base in Churchton, Raasay, from the end of December 1945 until 18 February 1946. Such was the success of this trial run that Maclean would thenceforth take up permanent residence in Scotland.

Prior to his return, Maclean wrote to his brother, Sorley, rather fatefully as it turned out: “that I am not sure if I want to return to Scotland for good. I don’t think I do. I am not at all keen on returning to Glasgow or Edinburgh, but would not mind spending ten to fifteen years collecting folklore in the Gaidhealtachd and Western Isles.” On returning, Maclean stated in a diary entry which may be described as his mission statement:



Angus Nicolson, 1950s.
• Courtesy of the MacLean family.



Oskaig Bay and Point, Raasay.
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I, Calum I. Maclean, began two days ago to collect the oral tradition of the island of Raasay. I was born and reared on this island. When I was young there were many people here who had tales and songs which had never been written down, and which never will be, since the old people are now dead, and all that they knew is with them in the

grave. There are still some people alive who remember some of the songs and traditions of their forefathers, and as it seemed to me that there are more songs than anything else available, I decided to write down those which I could find. I realise that we are sixty years late in beginning this work of collection, but we may be able to save at least some of the traditional lore before it dies out...

Considering Maclean’s own family were themselves renowned tradition bearers, then not to begin at home would have been deemed rather churlish. And so, for the next two months, Maclean amassed a great deal of lore from his own relations. The lion’s share of material being recorded from his maternal uncle, Angus Nicolson (1890–1965), styled *Aonghas Shomhairle Iain ’ic Shomhairle* and, his paternal aunt, Peggy MacLean (1869–1950), styled *Peigi Chaluim Iain Ghairbh*.