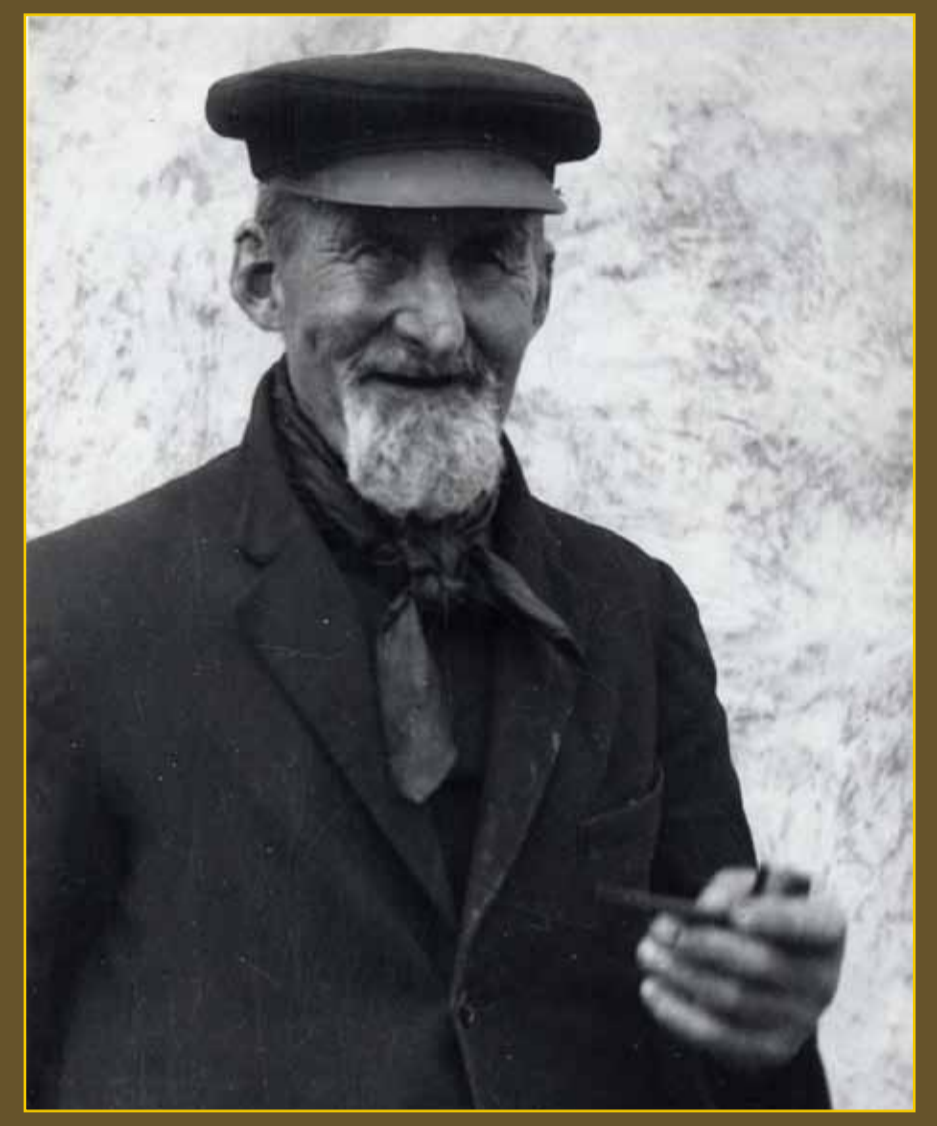
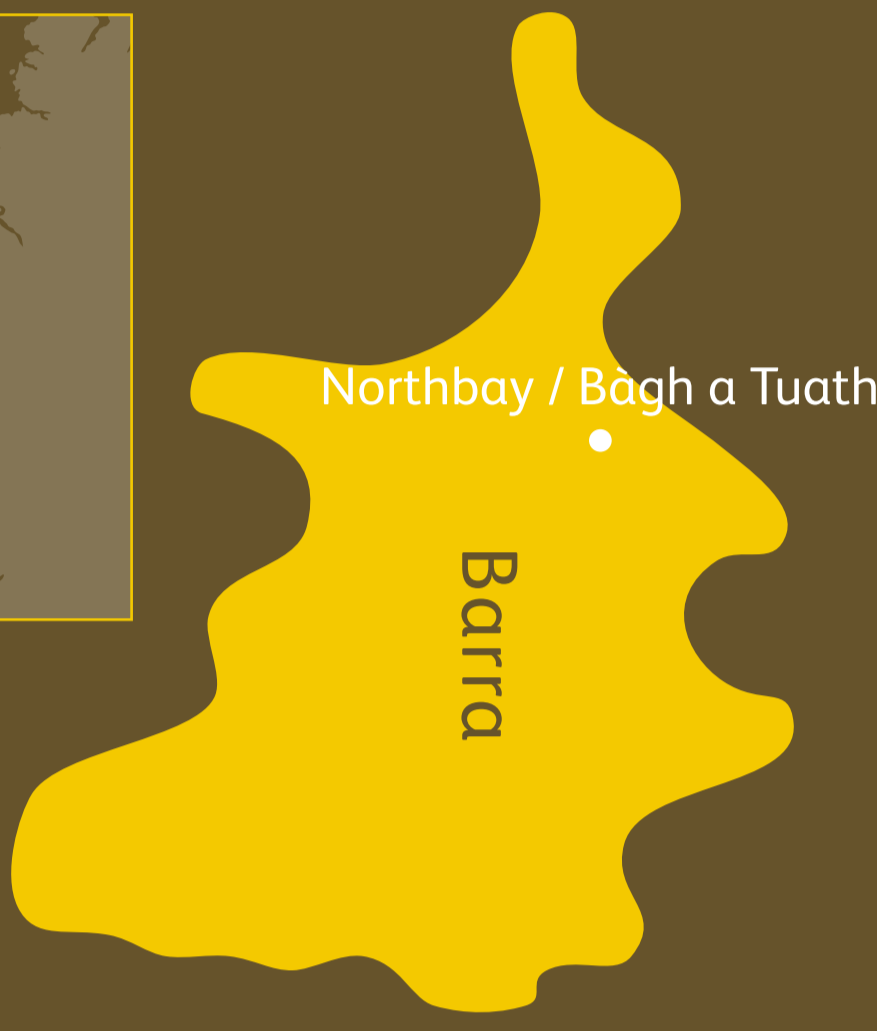


He was the first practised storyteller I had heard in Scotland. His diction was crisp, concise and clear...His style was that of the traditional Gaelic storyteller.

[Maclean writing in 1956]

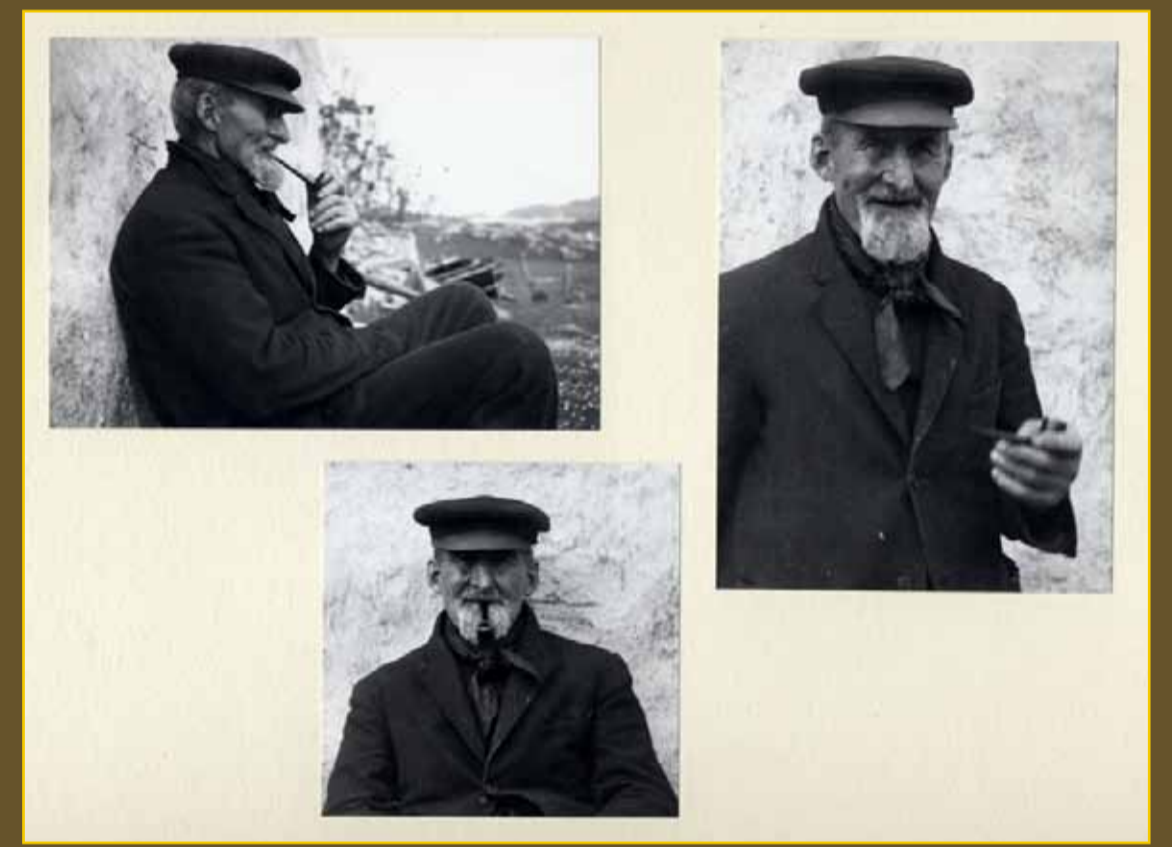


James MacKinnon, Northbay, 1947.
• Courtesy of the National Folklore Collection / Cruasach Bhealoideas Éireann, University College Dublin.

THE 'FAMOUS FOUR': JAMES MACKINNON (1866–1957)

Of the many hundreds of people from whom a vast array of oral materials were collected, Maclean reckoned four of them to be exceptionally talented.

These 'famous four' were a MacKinnon from Barra, a MacDonald from South Uist, a MacMillan from Benbecula, and another MacDonald from Brae Lochaber.



Montage of James MacKinnon, Northbay, Barra, 1947.
• Courtesy of the National Folklore Collection / Cruasach Bhealoideas Éireann, University College Dublin.

James MacKinnon from Northbay in Barra, styled *Seumas Iain Ghunnairigh*, was the first genuine storyteller that Maclean had encountered whose repertoire was representative of those collected by John Francis Campbell (1821–1885), styled *Iain Òg Ìle*, and his various collectors around a century before. Quoted in 1950, Maclean stated that MacKinnon like his storytelling predecessors "...was fortunate, I think, to have escaped one of the terrors of the age, the so-called Scottish education system."



James MacKinnon and Calum Maclean, Northbay, Barra, 1947.
• Courtesy of the National Folklore Collection / Cruasach Bhealoideas Éireann, University College Dublin.

"For any folklore collector," Maclean would later write, "the crucial time is when contact is first made with the tradition bearer. To Seumas MacKinnon I was a complete stranger, and much depended on the outcome of our first meeting. Every folklore collector must be prepared to efface himself and approach even the most humble tradition bearer with the deference due to the high and exalted."

True to his own words, Maclean lived out this principle to the full and when he spoke to Seumas in Gaelic, the old man received him warmly:

I noticed that he was very tall. His face was weather-beaten and his features were beautifully chiselled...At eighty he was still a very handsome old man. He was the first practised storyteller I had heard in Scotland. His diction was crisp, concise and clear. Every sentence was short and perfectly balanced. His style was that of the traditional Gaelic storyteller. His voice was beautifully clear and pleasing. He stamped his own personality on every story he told...



An Tràigh Mhòr, Eoligarry, Barra.
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