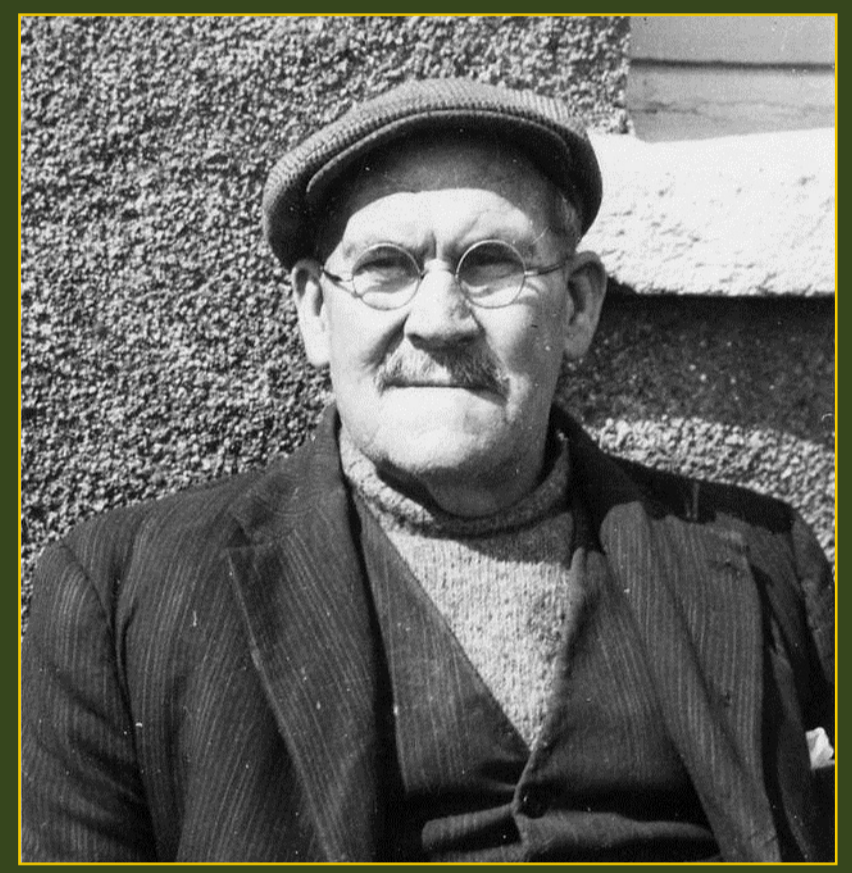
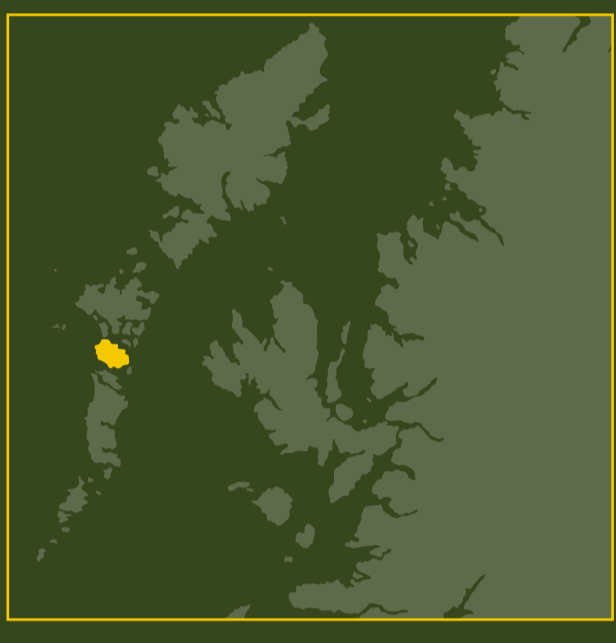


***To folklorists Angus was something more than a mere source of information. He was a phenomenon. His feats of storytelling are unequalled in the history of folklore recording.***

[Maclean writing in 1954]



Angus MacMillan, Griminish, Benbecula, c. 1950.  
• Courtesy of the School of Scottish Studies Archives.

## THE 'FAMOUS FOUR': ANGUS BARRACH MACMILLAN (1874-1954)

Standing at well over six feet tall and having a powerful physique, with deeply set brown eyes, even in 1947 at the age of seventy-two, Angus Barrach MacMillan of Griminish, Benbecula, made not only an impressive sight but was also a skilful storyteller.

Despite MacMillan complaining that not only was he suffering from a cold but had sustained a broken rib from an earlier fall, he told Maclean – something that would have been music to his ears – that “I have a Christendom of stories.”



Calum Òg MacMillan, Angus MacMillan holding nephew (Calum MacMillan) and Calum Maclean, Griminish, c. 1952.  
• Courtesy of the Maclean family.

*He started off that day by chanting a heroic lay dating back to the Viking times, the lay of the one-footed smith from Lochlann who enticed the Fingalians to his smithy in order to stab them. I had not heard the traditional chanting of heroic lays before.*



Griminish, Benbecula.  
• Licensed under Creative Commons.

Maclean soon found this out the hard way for recording Angus's stories alone – while not neglecting other storytellers – for a period of three years, MacMillan's repertoire was yet to be fully exhausted! A story recited by MacMillan has the distinction of being the longest ever to have been recorded in Western Europe. Called *Alasdair mac a' Chèaird* ('Alasdair son of the Caird'), it took

nine hours to tell and well over a week to transcribe.

Despite what may appear to be false modesty, Maclean noted that “Angus maintains that he had not even a third of the tales his father had...” yet MacMillan's family had been steeped in such oral traditions for generations:

*Calum MacMillan usually spent the nights twisting heather ropes... While thus engaged...told tales. When the hour of ten approached a three-legged pot of potatoes was hung over the fire...When the potatoes began to boil...the visitors knew it was time to go. The tale was then stopped to be continued the following night.*