
Angus of the Hills (c.1809 - c.1854)

DOUGLAS W. B. SOMERSET

Angus of the Hills, Aonghas nam Beann, is well known in Highland religious circles, though perhaps not given all the honour that he should be. The purpose of this article is to clarify, as far as possible, some of the dates and other basic facts of his life. For convenience, we have attached dates to the title and to several of the sections of this article but it should be emphasised that these dates are very much approximate. We are not claiming to have settled the various chronological questions that crop up.

1. Lewis (early years until about 1838)

Angus Macleod, Angus of the Hills, was born in the parish of Uig, Lewis.¹ His date of birth is uncertain but it was before 1810.² His father

¹ The principal sources for the life of Angus of the Hills are: *The Sunday at Home Family Magazine for Sabbath Reading* (1892-3), pp. 69-71 (compiled by an anonymous “gentleman” from information supplied by Mrs Bishop of Tobermory); Principal John Macleod, “Angus of the Hills”, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, vol. 2 (1897-8), pp. 349-52 (cited below as Macleod); Malcolm Macphail, “Notes on Religion in Lewis, Part VII”, *Oban Times*, Saturday 1st 1898, Part VIII, Saturday 8th October (obtainable from Stornoway Public Library); Roderick MacCowan, *The Men of Skye* (Portree, 1902), pp. 147-153; Norman C. Macfarlane, *The Men of the Lewes* (Stornoway [1924] (we quote from the partial reprint *The Men of Lewis* (Stornoway, c. 1954)); Donald Beaton, *Memoir . . . of Rev Neil Cameron* (Inverness, 1932), pp. 109-112 (cited below as Cameron); and Murdo Macaulay, *Aspects of the Religious History of Lewis* (1985), pp. 192-7. As is usual, there are certain inconsistencies between these sources. A recent account of Angus’ life can be found in John Macleod, *Banner in the West* (Edinburgh, 2008), pp. 149-52.

² Macleod, p. 349.

was living at this time in the village of Carishader but when Angus was a few years old he moved to Aird Bheag, a remote spot on the south side of Loch Hamanaway. The family included two sisters who were simpletons like Angus, another sister Mary who was married in Brenish, and a brother Murdo who settled in Doune, Carloway in 1872. During his childhood Angus would sometimes tear off his clothes and injure himself with rocks in a manner resembling the demoniac Legion.³ From the various anecdotes, it does not seem that Angus' father was spiritually touched by the Lewis revival. There is no mention of his mother in any of the accounts.

The Lewis revival began in 1822 but the parish of Uig remained unaffected by it until the settlement of Alexander Macleod in Uig on 28th April 1824. Indeed shortly before Macleod's arrival there were only two or three Bibles in the entire parish.⁴ The revival spread to Uig within about a month of his settlement, but for two years he refused to celebrate communion because of the ignorance of the people. When eventually a communion was held, on 24th June 1827, the assisting minister, who arrived unexpectedly, was John Macdonald, the Apostle of the North. The congregation numbered seven thousand, but only six of the eight hundred to a thousand members in Uig communicated, and many who were under concern or who were converted were afraid to come forward. At the communion the following year the congregation numbered nine thousand, but probably there were no more than about fifteen communicants from Uig.⁵

Angus was converted sometime in the late 1820s, probably while still in his teens. "This complete change in his life took place on hearing, at a meeting on the hillside, some text spoken which lodged itself in his heart." Thereafter he became very attached to Alexander Macleod and his wife.⁶ He was one of the early converts of the Uig revival,⁷ and was

³ Macleod, p. 349; Macaulay, p. 192; *Sunday at Home*, p. 69.

⁴ *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands* (Edinburgh, 1877), p. 222; Macleod, p. 349.

⁵ Donald Beaton (ed), *Diary and Sermons of Rev Alexander Macleod* (Inverness, 1925), pp. 10, 14, 19; John Kennedy, *The Apostle of the North* (Inverness, 1932), p. 276; *History of Revivals of Religion in the British Isles* (Edinburgh, 1836), p. 363. In 1833 there were sixty communicant members, according to the *Statistical Account*, giving an average increase of nine a year since 1827. In 1834 there were thirty-one male heads-of-household in Uig who were communicant members; see John Macleod, *A Brief Record of the Church in Uig* (Lewis) (Uig, 2001), p. 9.

⁶ *Sunday at Home*, pp. 69, 71.

⁷ Norman C. Macfarlane, *Apostles of the North* (Stornoway, 1931), p. 38 (in 1990s reprint).

friendly with John Macrae (Big Macrae) who was teaching in the parish of Uig from about 1825 onwards. Macrae was licensed by the Presbytery of Lewis on 7th September 1830 and became assistant in Gairloch soon afterwards, so Angus' conversion must have occurred well before that date. The first time that Angus came before the Uig kirk session he was refused admission on the grounds of his idiocy.⁸ Had this been the 1827 communion, one feels that such an interesting circumstance would have been mentioned, so it was probably the 1828 communion at which he first applied. Thus it was probably the 1829 communion at which he was accepted by the kirk session.

In September 1829 Robert Finlayson, whose wife was from Uig, became minister of Knock; and in June 1831 he moved to Lochs where he continued until 1856. There is an anecdote, in different versions, of Finlayson interviewing two or three women in his congregation regarding their conversions. The first one was reluctant to answer but eventually disclosed that it was hearing Angus pray in private that led to her conversion. The second woman said that it was hearing the first woman describe Angus' prayer that led to her conversion. The third woman had been converted through Finlayson's ministry. This incident probably dates from the early part of Finlayson's ministry in Lochs.⁹

In July 1833, or soon afterwards, John Macrae was settled as minister in Cross, and a couple of well known anecdotes about Angus date from this period.¹⁰ For a reason that will be mentioned in Section 3, it seems likely that Angus was largely resident in Cross rather than Uig after 1833.

2. Skye and Lochalsh (1838-1846)

In February 1838, Roderick Macleod moved from Bracadale to become minister of Snizort and it was probably about this time that Angus started attending communions in Skye. There is no record of Angus having been in Bracadale and there was no other minister on the island at that stage whose communions Angus would have wished to attend. Angus soon became greatly attached to Roderick Macleod.¹¹ "Once

⁸ Macfarlane, *Men*, p. 19.

⁹ Macphail, part VII; *Sunday at Home*, p. 71; Macfarlane, *Men*, p. 20.

¹⁰ Macleod, pp. 350-1; Cameron, pp. 109-110.

¹¹ Macleod, p. 351.

he came to Skye,” says MacCowan, “he seldom left it, and only on communion occasions went elsewhere.”¹²

MacCowan says that Angus left Lewis after a row with his father and never returned but this conflicts with Mrs Bishop’s account.¹³ Mrs Bishop, however, was probably less well-informed about Angus’ life than one would gather from her article. Perhaps there was a second row after which Angus never returned to his father’s house, or perhaps he never returned to Uig. Certainly there seems to have been a period when Angus was absent from Lewis. In September 1839 John Macrae left Cross for Knockbain and in January 1844 Alexander Macleod moved from Uig to Lochalsh, and both these departures would have loosened Angus’ attachment to his native island. Principal Macleod states that Angus lived in Skye after 1846, when Alexander Macleod became minister of Rogart, but we are inclined to think he must have started to live in Skye considerably before this.¹⁴ Furthermore, after 1846 he became a frequent visitor to Tobermory, as we shall soon see, and Mrs Bishop gives the impression that he was largely resident in Lewis at that time.

The result of Alexander Macleod’s translation to Lochalsh in 1844 was that Angus started attending communions there. The Lochalsh Free Church had been erected in Ardelve by Isaac Lillingston (1802-1850) of Balmacara House. He was a nephew of William Wilberforce and, though they belonged to the Church of England, he and his wife Katherine (1811-75) gave warm support to the Free Church. His wife was heiress to Balmacara House which had been built by her great uncle Sir Hugh Innes, Bt, of Lochalsh about 1807. Sir Hugh (1764-1831) was the son of Hugh Innes (1726-1765), a Cameronian minister, who had embraced the Amyraldian views of the Atonement expressed by Fraser of Brea and had left the Cameronians at the Breach of 1753.¹⁵ The Lillingstones were married in 1832 and had three surviving children, Charlotte b. 1846,

¹² MacCowan, p. 148.

¹³ MacCowan, p. 148. Mrs Bishop implies that Angus was returning to Lewis by the late 1840s. In her version of the row, Angus, fleeing after breaking his father’s hoe, prayed for help when he saw the anger in his father’s eyes. At that moment, his pursuing father stumbled and fractured a bone in his foot. Angus, however, instead of leaving home, was greatly concerned and did all that he could to care for his father, *Sunday at Home*, pp. 70-1.

¹⁴ Macleod, p. 351.

¹⁵ W. J. Couper, “The Reformed Presbyterian Church in Scotland”, *Records of the Scottish Church History Society*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh, 1925), p. 81.

Katherine b. 1847, and Frederick b. 1849. Presumably they had many bereavements and sorrows between 1832 and 1846. Balmacara house was sold in 1853, following Mr Lillingstone's early death, but a part of the estate remained in Lillingstone hands until 1953.

When Angus went to Lochalsh for a communion he was "kindly received and welcomed" by the Lillingstones. It was probably on this occasion that someone said to Angus, "Might you not be proud, Angus, when the lady of this house asked you to her table?"; to which Angus replied, "Indeed; she might rather think much of the grace that humbled her so that she would take poor Angus to her table". The same story is also told in connection with Angus' visits to the Snizort manse, but the Lillingstone version seems more likely.¹⁶ Neil Cameron mentions that Angus on one occasion travelled from Lochalsh to Inverness to attend a communion, and presumably it was at the conclusion of one of his visits to Lochalsh that Angus made the journey.¹⁷

3. Tobermory (1847 onwards)

Another ministerial settlement of significance to Angus, which took place soon after the Disruption, was that of Peter Maclean in Tobermory. Peter Maclean (1800-1868) was, like Angus, a native of Uig, Lewis. He was converted during the revival in November 1825 and then briefly attended Aberdeen Grammar School, before matriculating at King's College, Aberdeen in 1828 where he studied for one year. The following session he transferred to Edinburgh. He returned to Uig as a teacher from 1832 to 1836. In 1836 he was licensed by the Presbytery of Lewis and the next year he was sent out to Whycocomagh, Cape Breton, as an ordained missionary.¹⁸ He returned to Scotland through ill-health in 1841. At the Disruption, he joined the Free Church and was settled in August 1843 at Tobermory. The congregation numbered a thousand but they were very poor; nevertheless a church was built, and a manse purchased, within a few months of the Disruption. Shortly after his

¹⁶ Macleod, pp. 351-2.

¹⁷ Cameron, p. 111.

¹⁸ Rev John MacLeod, Free Presbyterian minister, London, has a copy of the *Edinburgh Christian Instructor* of 1839 with the inscription "Revd Peter M'Lean, Whycocomah" – a volume that was presumably in the Tobermory manse during Angus' visits.

settlement he married Flora Campbell, “a lady of superior piety and gifts and social position”.¹⁹

The communions in Tobermory were held, as far as we can gather, on the first Sabbath of July and the first Sabbath of December and Angus became a regular visitor at these. He came with “Mistress Peggie McKenzie” from Lewis who was “well known throughout the Isles for her eminent life and character”. “Angus,” it is said, “had attached himself to her so strongly that a separation could not be thought of. At the half-yearly communion Mistress McKenzie used to come and stay at the Free Church manse, and was always accompanied by Angus, who was accommodated in some ‘bothain’ not far off. He was allowed free ingress at the manse, and would run in and out, and follow his friends about ‘just like a doggie’. A word from Mistress McKenzie was law to him; at a look, or a sign of her uplifted finger, he would instantly stop when she thought he was talking too much. His reverence and affection for her were unbounded.”²⁰

Neil Cameron, who was from the parish of Kilninver near Mull, relates that on one occasion Ewen Cameron, who was similar to Angus in piety and in simplicity, also attended the communion at Tobermory, and that he and Angus got on so well that they stayed for six months, presumably until the next communion.²¹ It is known that Angus was in Tobermory on 19th August 1847, the day when Queen Victoria passed down the Sound of Mull.²² This was six weeks after the July communion so it could be that the six months in question were from July to December 1847. If so, it must have been at the July communion of 1847 that the following slightly puzzling anecdote, related by Neil Cameron, occurred.²³

On the Thursday of the communion, immediately after Angus and Ewen had met, Ewen started addressing some men standing opposite the Free Church manse about the state of their souls. Angus listened attentively. Peter Maclean saw that a crowd was gathering and thought

¹⁹ *Disruption Worthies of the Highlands*, pp. 213-6; Thomas Brown, *Annals of the Disruption* (Edinburgh, 1892), pp. 194, 271; William Ewing, *Annals of the Free Church of Scotland* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1914), vol. 2, p. 122. Of the one thousand adherents, sixty were communicant members in 1848.

²⁰ *Sunday at Home*, p. 70.

²¹ Cameron, p. 94.

²² *Sunday at Home*, p. 71.

²³ Cameron, p. 94-5.

that he should intervene. John Macrae, who must have been assisting at the communion, and who knew Angus better than Maclean did, advised him to do nothing, but his advice was not taken. Maclean asked Ewen and Angus what they were doing and ordered them into the manse. Angus paid no attention and said to Ewen, "You are doing very well, Ewen; never heed him, for that is Satan's way, always when anyone is doing good, he tells them to stop it and go home". Maclean retired into the manse and was asked by Macrae how he had got on with his friends. "Get on with them! They compared me to Satan and did not take my advice."²⁴

The puzzling thing about the story is that Peter Maclean, who was from Uig, apparently did not know what Angus was like. A possible explanation, however, is that Maclean was away from Uig from about 1827 until 1832, covering the period of Angus' conversion, and that soon after Maclean's return to Uig, Macrae was settled in Cross and perhaps Angus was then largely resident in Cross rather than Uig. Angus frequently addressed people after a service when he had enjoyed the sermon, so it seems likely, from Maclean's unawareness, that this incident took place during Angus' first visit to Tobermory.²⁵

4. Mrs Bishop (1850 onwards)

One celebrated person with whom Angus came in contact, probably as a result of his visits to Tobermory, was the extraordinary Isabella Bird (1831-1904), later Mrs Bishop of Tobermory. Isabella Bird was the daughter of an evangelical Church of England clergyman, Edward Bird. Her father was a first cousin of John Bird Sumner, Archbishop of Canterbury (1848-1862), and her father's mother was a first cousin of William Wilberforce.²⁶ For health reasons, her family started coming on

²⁴ We have been unable either to confirm or to disprove that Macrae assisted at the communion of July 1847. The pre-1855 Free Church Kirk Session records for Tobermory are not known to have survived, while those for Knockbain, which date from 1844, are minimal. They do not record any meeting of the Kirk Session at the beginning of July 1847, so Macrae could have been away as far as they are concerned. The Knockbain Free Church Deacons' Court records date from 1849 (and the minister was not usually present anyway).

²⁵ Macleod, pp. 351-2.

²⁶ She was thus connected with the Lillingstones of Balmacara mentioned above. In 1855 she stayed for a month at Balmacara House but by this time it was out of Lillingstone hands. In 1886 a "Miss Lillingstone", probably one of the daughters, was a mourner at Dr Bishop's funeral, see Anna Stoddart, *The Life of Isabella Bird (Mrs Bishop)* (London, 1906), pp. 40, 175.

holiday to Scotland in 1850, and her sister Henrietta eventually settled in Tobermory. Her father was a zealous defender of the Sabbath and was delighted with the Sabbath observance that he found in Scotland. He was welcomed on his visits by the Free Church and “he preached in many of their churches, in Inverness and Ross-shire, in Skye, in Renfrew, and elsewhere”.²⁷

Meanwhile Isabella, who suffered from ill-health, had started to travel. As soon as she went abroad her health remarkably improved. Her first trip, in 1854, was to America and on her return she published an anonymous account of her journey.²⁸ In 1857 she went again to America and to Canada. After her mother’s death in 1868 she resumed her travels, which were to become increasingly adventurous. In 1873, on her way back from Hawaii, she visited the Rocky Mountains in Colorado and climbed the 14,000ft Long’s Peak, Colorado, only five years after the first ascent. Her guide was a one-eyed Irish fur-trapper named Jim Nugent with whom she developed a rapport. He was shot dead the next year. In 1878-9 she visited Japan, China, Vietnam, Singapore, and Malaya. In 1880 her sister died and the following year she married John Bishop who was a physician and surgeon in Edinburgh. He, however, died in 1886 leaving her free to travel once more. She trained as a medical missionary and in 1889-90 she went to India, Tibet, Persia, Kurdistan, and Turkey, travelling briefly with Lord Curzon. In 1893 she became the first female Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society. In 1894-5 she visited Korea and China, and in 1896 she took a journey up the Yangtze River. All these trips were described in detail in popular travel books.

Mrs Bishop, not surprisingly, continues to interest historians, but her modern biographers have little to say about her Christianity and scarcely mention her writings on religious subjects. In 1859 she published *Aspects of Religion in the United States*, an account of the revival then in progress, based on her observations during her trip to America and Canada. During the next few years she contributed numerous articles to the *Family Treasury* and other publications, including at least ten pieces on hymnology between 1865 and 1869 to *The Sunday Magazine*,

²⁷ Stoddart, p. 26.

²⁸ Forty-five copies of this were bought for her friends in Ross-shire and Skye, Stoddart, pp. 38-9.

edited by Thomas Guthrie. In March 1881 she wrote an appreciation of Robert Candlish for *The Catholic Presbyterian*, edited by W. G. Blaikie.²⁹

Mrs Bishop's account of Angus is of great interest as being the nearest thing that we have to a firsthand account of him.³⁰ Unfortunately, however, it introduces considerable chronological difficulties which we have not been able to resolve. The main difficulty is that Mrs Bishop says that she first met Angus when he was "not much over twenty years of age" and that he was "probably rather over thirty years of age" at the time of his death. This seems to imply that he died a decade or more after she first met him. But the earliest date at which she could have met him was 1850, by which time he was over forty, and a more likely date for the first meeting would be about 1852. A decade later he would have been well over fifty. Even if Principal Macleod were wrong about Angus being born before 1810 (he does not give us his authority), Angus can hardly have been born much after 1812 since he was admitted to membership by the Uig kirk session before 1830 and it was not the common practice then to admit juveniles. On the whole, we have felt obliged to discount Mrs Bishop's chronology. She was writing thirty or forty years after the events, and it is difficult to know how accurate her memory was.

Mrs Bishop gives a vivid description of Angus' childlike attachment to Peter Maclean's wife, Flora Campbell:

He soon showed a strong attachment to the minister's wife, and when he became well acquainted with her, he would sit at her feet,

²⁹ The author of the appreciation was described as "A Member of the Church of England", though the initials "I. L. B." were appended at the end. She was not an uncritical admirer of Candlish, as the following curious extract shows: "The reader of [Candlish's] lectures . . . is in some respects in a better position than the hearer. It was often difficult to follow the ingenious subtleties of his dialectic, his minute and labored analysis, the process of extrusion by which he finally arrived at a precise definition of a point which did not always appear to be worth defining, his elaborate metaphysical theories, his labored and (as it frequently appeared) unsatisfactory explanations of the inexplicable, his careful, but not always useful balancing of opposing views, the hair-splitting, which was rather productive of intellectual exercise than of edification, and the elaborate fencing-in of his interpretation of a passage from every other interpretation which any other mind might suppose it capable of bearing" (p. 195).

³⁰ Strictly, her account is not firsthand because it was written by a "gentleman" from information mostly supplied by Mrs Bishop; but nevertheless it was through Mrs Bishop that it was submitted to *Sunday at Home*. Malcolm Macphail, who wrote the *Oban Times* articles, was born in Shawbost, Lewis, in 1837 and might therefore have known Angus but he does not provide any personal recollections.

take her hand in his, and looking up in her face, say, "Angus, now, since he knew the Lord Jesus, never goes into a passion nor tears his clothes off"; while thus speaking, his face assumed a peculiarly sweet expression other-world like, and the want of intellectual expression gave place to the bright glow of spiritual feeling, which quite charmed the observer.

In church he never misconducted himself, except in one respect. Whenever a text was made use of or referred to which was an especial favourite with him he would laugh. His seat in the old Free Church at Tobermory was in the gallery, and so situated that by a peculiar effort to lean forward, and by twisting his head round, he could get a sight of the minister's wife, and he would not be content till he could convince himself, by the evidence of sight, that she was sympathising with him in his pleasure. The whole movement was so peculiar that it made it difficult for her to control her amusement, especially as she so well knew what his favourite texts were, and when she could expect the demands upon her sympathy made in Angus' curious fashion, and with a face brimming over with the joy of intense satisfaction.³¹

In May 1855 Peter Maclean became Free Church minister of Stornoway, so it is not likely that Peggie McKenzie and Angus attended any Tobermory communions after that of December 1854. The charge remained vacant until 1857 when Christopher Munro, later of Strathy, became minister.

5. Death and burial

Angus' death almost certainly took place during the 1850s. Principal Macleod says that "his life on earth was not very long" and that he died "about forty years" before January 1898 when Macleod was writing. If we

³¹ *Sunday at Home*, p. 70. Mrs Maclean was evidently a remarkable woman. Here is a description of her from her Stornoway days: "Miss Flora Campbell of Langarmull had a noble face, and reigned in the manse with genial royalty. She would be a princess in any circle. There was something in her bearing that commanded respect, and in her kindness that evoked affection. She lives in boyhood's memory as our Stornoway Queen Victoria. In my young days she wore a bonnet of the coalscuttle type with bows of heliotrope in front. It framed a face with shining eyes, firm lips, and a broad chin," Macfarlane, *Apostles*, pp. 68-9 (in 1990s reprint).

followed Mrs Bishop, we would place his death after 1860, but we are inclined to think that it was considerably before this. Peter Maclean moved to Stornoway in May 1855, as we have mentioned, and so attached was Angus to Peter Maclean, and to his wife in particular, that one feels, had Angus been alive, that there would have been anecdotes dating from the Stornoway period. In the absence of these, it seems probable that Angus was dead before Maclean left Tobermory. Furthermore, Mrs Bishop states that Angus was on his way back to Lewis when he died, and gives the impression that it was from Tobermory that he was returning. If so, then December 1854 gives an approximate latest date for Angus' death. A later date would slightly ease the difficulty over the photograph (see Section 6) but would raise the difficulty of a lack of reminiscences for this period of Angus' life. Indeed, every anecdote about Angus that can be dated comes from before 1850: the only things that definitely postdate 1850 are his acquaintance with Mrs Bishop and his photograph.

Angus died in Uig, Skye, and was buried in the old graveyard next to the River Conan. On Sabbath 13th October 1877 the River Conan flooded in what was one of the most dramatic flash floods in recent British history. The road-bridge, the Uig Lodge, and most of the old graveyard, were swept away. Here is an account of the devastation by Alexander Ross, Provost of Inverness, presented to the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club in December of that year:

A short way down, we suddenly emerged on the plain of the Bay of Uig and here the full fury of the floods could be realised. Directly above us on the right were the remains of a sandy-looking bank, which, on closer inspection, proved to be the portion remaining of the old burying-ground, in parts of which we could detect pieces of the coffins; and in the bed of the burn lay a tombstone, and beside it a coffin, the body partially revealed by the damage the coffin had sustained in its fall. I learned that only one-fourth of the burying-ground is left, the remainder having, with all the bodies, been carried out to sea. Close by the graveyard stood the bridge leading the public road across to Kilmuir. This bridge was swept away by the rush of water through the ravine, and with it about 100 feet of embankment and now exhibits a gap of about 200 feet wide.

At this point the full destructive effect of the floods can best be seen. The waters rose till they filled the archway, and then

undermining the bridge till it gave way, the pent up floods burst with their full strength on the plain below, hurling enormous quantities of *debris* down on to the flat of the bay. Overleaping its banks, the river cleared a new channel for itself, carrying the soil and crops of whole fields with it in its new course. The strength of the current would have been checked by the enclosure walls of the policies and gardens of Uig Lodge, but these formed but a slight obstruction to such a powerful body of water, and soon finding a gap in the wall which protected the grounds, it cast it down, and, forming a channel on either side of the lodge, it gradually cut them out to a depth of seven or eight feet, leaving the house as it were, on an island. Undercutting these banks, the fall of the house was the question of but a few minutes, with the lamentable results already stated. The scene was one long to be remembered – the whole valley one mass of *debris*; fields covered with stones; of the fine plantation by the river side not a trace, save one tree, remained; while about the lodge the shrubs exhibited a curious crop of *turnips*. These had been washed against the trees, and there suspended at a height of four or five feet, giving singular evidence of the tide mark of the flood.³²

The whole bay was littered with corpses, but amidst all this devastation, Angus' grave was undisturbed. The traces of the flood are still evident a hundred and thirty years later. The embankment cut in the graveyard by the river can still be seen, and in it are the stones inserted to cover the sides of the skeletons which had become exposed.³³ Angus' grave has been without a marker at least since 1950, but presumably it originally had one since its location was accurately known in 1877.³⁴ The surviving part of the graveyard is small and the boundary wall, though collapsed, is clearly visible. Thus, unmarked as it is, the approximate location of Angus' grave is still known with reasonable accuracy.

³² D. Nairne, *Memorable Floods in the Highland During the Nineteenth Century* (Inverness, 1895), p. 92.

³³ "In the small part of the grave-yard which remained, tiers of bleached skeletons were to be seen, reposing as they had been placed, and presenting a ghastly sight to the passer by," Nairne, p. 89.

³⁴ Macaulay, p. 197.

6. The photograph

One of the unusual things about Angus is that there is a photograph of him. He had many eminent contemporaries among the godly men and women of Skye and Lewis, but, ministers apart, he is the only one of whom a photograph survives. Murdo Macaulay published a reproduction of this photograph in *Aspects of the Religious History of Lewis*, and this in turn was reproduced in *Banner in the West*.³⁵ The whereabouts of the nineteenth century original is not known, but what is extant is a postcard, produced, presumably from the original, in the 1920s or 1930s



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and which seems to have had a reasonably wide circulation in the Western Isles. We currently know of three copies, two in Lochinver and one in Scourie, which are all thought to have come from the same source in Skye. The reproduction in Macaulay's book was taken from a framed picture on the desk in his study – probably another copy of this postcard.

The identification of the picture as Angus of the Hills now rests largely on Macaulay's ascription, but there seems no reason to doubt it.³⁶ The producer of the postcard, seventy or eighty years after the death of Angus, was unlikely to have seen him but had probably known people who had; and there are many pictures identified on no better evidence than this. Everything about the photograph fits with what is known of Angus. He was a simpleton but a very godly man – the photograph looks right for such a person. The hair is black and the eyes are blue or green (not brown) – this is common colouring for natives of Lewis. The arms are thin and the hands small, showing that he was unaccustomed to

³⁵ Macaulay, p. 193; *Banner in the West*, between pp. 174 and 175.

³⁶ One of the copies of the postcard has "Angus of the Hills" written on the back, in an inscription that one guesses might date to the 1940s.

manual labour. This agrees with Mrs Bishop's description: "Angus was rather under the average height, slight, loosely built, thin, of a very weather-worn appearance." Mrs Bishop says that "usually his gait was uncertain, his fingers and limbs were subject to twitches and movements, as if under the working of his thoughts uncontrolled; but when engrossed in prayer or in spiritual conversation there was a calmness, a serious absorption, which overcame and did away with any ungainliness of bearing". It is easy to imagine that she is describing the person in the picture. She says, too, that "Angus had an unconquerable aversion to wearing a bonnet, he always kept his head bare". Again, the person in the picture has no hat (though men were generally photographed without hats at that stage). All these small details help to confirm the identification of the photograph.³⁷

The question of when and where the photograph was taken is difficult. At this point a brief digression on the early history of photography is necessary. The first photographs date from the 1820s, and the first Scottish photographs from the 1840s. The two original processes were the daguerreotype and the calotype. The *daguerreotype* was introduced in 1839 and yielded an image on a metallic surface. The image had remarkable detail but it was expensive, required very long exposure times, could not be reproduced, was laterally inverted, and could only be viewed from selected angles. It was also fragile and had to be sealed behind glass to protect it from the air.

The *calotype* was introduced by Fox Talbot in the autumn of 1840. It was patented in England, but the patent restriction did not extend to Scotland where it became popular among enthusiasts. D. O. Hill and Robert Adamson took calotype pictures of most the leading figures of the Free Church after the Disruption of 1843. The calotype produced an image on paper and was less detailed than the daguerreotype but cheaper. It involved a negative, which allowed the production of multiple copies, but the quality of the copy depended on the paper of the negative, and minute defects, such as an area where the paper was slightly thinner, could ruin the picture.

In March 1851, Frederick Archer published in *The Chemist* a description of a new method, the *collodion* process, which used a glass plate for the negative rather than paper. The collodion process was about a twentieth the price of the daguerreotype, and much simpler than the

³⁷ *Sunday at Home*, pp. 70-1.

calotype, and once introduced it rapidly became popular. By 1857, the *Art Journal* was complaining that “photography has become so far popularized that its practice may be at times considered a public nuisance. In the suburbs of London, particularly at the east end, the streets are impassable with ‘touters’ of rival establishments, who with showy gilt frames in hand, intercept all passengers, and almost drag them into their dens.”³⁸

The postcard of Angus appears, from the slanting crack at the bottom, to derive from an image on glass. The glass was broken but the image had not faded along the crack, showing that the image was not a daguerreotype. Being on glass, it was not a calotype, and it must therefore be a collodion process picture, and hence date from sometime between March 1851 and his death.

The difficulty is that West Highland photographs from the 1850s are extremely rare. One possibility is that the picture was taken during Angus’ visit to Inverness. There are three calotypes of Inverness taken by the antiquary Cosmo Innes in the 1840s, and presumably there are photographs from the 1850s as well. Certainly any travelling photographer, with all the equipment required for the collodion process, would find it easier to visit Inverness than more remote places. We have seen, however, that Angus’ visit to Inverness probably occurred between 1843 and 1846, and this was too early for the collodion process. Furthermore it is recorded that when he went to Inverness he received, in a remarkable way, a new waistcoat and pair of trousers.³⁹ It is difficult to be sure, but the trousers in the photograph of Angus appear to have rents in both legs, while the waistcoat is missing a button. It seems, therefore, that the Inverness possibility can be excluded.

The other places known to have been visited by Angus in the 1850s are Mull, Skye, and Lewis. The earliest surviving pictures of Mull date from about the 1880s, so Mull too can probably be excluded.⁴⁰ The

³⁸ Quoted in Sara Stevenson, *David Octavius Hill and Robert Adamson* (Edinburgh, 1981), p. 22. Some idea of the spread of commercial photography in Scotland can be gained from a website listing early Ayrshire photographers (resident or visiting). The list is based largely on newspaper advertisements. There was one photographer in the late 1840s, two before 1855, and a further sixteen before 1860.

³⁹ Cameron, pp. 111-12.

⁴⁰ I am grateful to Jean Whittaker, Honorary Archivist of Mull Museum, for this information. It should be emphasized that this “earliest date”, and those that follow, are generally tentative.

earliest account of a photographer in Skye is in 1865, but it is evident that the writer of the account was not surprised to meet a photographer which strongly suggests that this photographer was not the first.⁴¹ Thus Skye remains a possibility, though it would be strange if the only surviving trace of photography in Skye from the 1850s were the picture of Angus.

The remaining and most likely possibility is Lewis. The earliest recorded photograph from Lewis is a daguerrotype of the Lewis Castle taken from Arnish Point by the Northern Lighthouse Board in 1849; while the earliest known commercial photographer resident in Lewis was Samuel Hay, admitted into Lodge Fortrose, the Masonic Lodge, in 1867.⁴² There is some evidence, however, of earlier photographic opportunities in Lewis; and the people involved have a connection, though perhaps somewhat tenuous, with Angus.

The youngest sister of Angus' first minister, Alexander Macleod of Uig, was interested in photographs and tried many times, unsuccessfully, to persuade her husband, Angus Matheson, to sit for a photograph.⁴³ Alexander Macleod was born in 1786 and his sister stayed with him in Edinburgh about 1814 to help his newly-married wife with the housework, so she must have been born about 1800 or earlier. In the 1820s she and her husband moved to Lewis, where he was a teacher for at least forty years. By the 1850s and '60s they were living in Callanish. From their ages, one would think that it was probably before 1867 that she was making her repeated attempts to have him photographed.

Who was the photographer that she had in mind? It is possible that there were commercial photographers regularly visiting Lewis, but in that case they must even more frequently have been visiting Skye which was much easier to reach. But there is no trace of them in Skye (the 1865 photographer was an artist, not a commercial photographer), so it seems unlikely that they were visiting Lewis with any regularity. There was, however, one photographer operating in Lewis before 1867

⁴¹ Alexander Smith, *A Summer in Skye* (2 vols., London, 1865), vol. 2, pp. 119, 123-7. I am grateful to Cailean Maclean, Aird Bernisdale, Skye, for this reference.

⁴² I am grateful to Malcolm Macdonald and William Foulger for information about early photography in Lewis.

⁴³ Macfarlane, *Men*, p. 29. Like many of the "Men", Angus Matheson regarded photography as a breach of the Second Commandment. This makes it all the more remarkable that Angus of the Hills should have been photographed.

and this was Lady Mary Jane Matheson (c. 1822-1896), the wife of Sir James Matheson who had bought Lewis in 1844. Lady Matheson became a member of the Photographic Society of Scotland in 1856, the year of its foundation, and she exhibited eight photographs at its exhibition of December that year, and a number at the subsequent exhibitions of 1857, 1858, and 1859.

It is not known where Lady Matheson learned photography, or when she began, but she evidently had ability. Her work, according to a modern critic, shows “sophistication both in technique and in composition”.⁴⁴ Only a few of her photographs are known to have survived.⁴⁵ All those which have, or of which there is a description, depict members of the upper classes, but perhaps this is because these are all from exhibitions or from family scrap albums. There is some indication that she might have been taking photographs of more general subjects but of these there are presently no examples.⁴⁶ It is just possible, therefore, that Lady Matheson was the potential photographer for Angus Matheson, though hardly likely; and it is even possible that she took the photograph of Angus of the Hills. It is hard to imagine the noble Lady fussing over her chemicals while the dishevelled simpleton is persuaded to sit still, but the other possible explanations for the photograph of Angus seem equally far-fetched, if not more so.

In summary, therefore, we think that the possibility should at least be considered that the photograph was taken by Lady Matheson, or by someone in her circle, in Lewis in the early 1850s.⁴⁷ But wherever it was

⁴⁴ Quentin Bajac, “Fragments of Lady Matheson’s work considered”, *Studies in Photography* (1999-2000), pp. 22-25. Her earliest surviving photographs are dated to c. 1855.

⁴⁵ Her fifteen known photographs were purchased by the Musée d’Orsay, Paris, in 1985, Bajac, p. 22.

⁴⁶ A collection of her photographs was auctioned by Phillips, London, in 1986 but these cannot now be located. The catalogue description was as follows: “Lady Matheson: An album entitled *The Past to the Present*, presented by Lady Denys [sister of Lady Matheson] to Eliza Denys in 1874, mostly comprising scraps dating back to 1830s including albumenised salt prints and salt prints by Lady Matheson, most of guests and views at Château de Veauce, clerics, children, elderly women, her husband Sir James Matheson, etc.” Another album “with photographs depicting the Matheson family in the 1860s . . . said to have been taken by one of the nieces of Lady Matheson” is in Museum Nan Eilean, Stornoway, but at the time of writing this could not be examined (Bajac, p. 25).

⁴⁷ Up to about 1855, photographic prints were mainly on salted paper, and thereafter albumen paper predominated. The photograph of Angus bears a closer resemblance to

taken, and even if we adopt the very latest date for his death – sometime in the early 1860s – the photograph is still exceptionally early for any of the places known to have been connected with Angus.⁴⁸

7. Angus as an evangelist

Angus may have been a simpleton but he had a number of abilities. One of these was an unexpected power of spiritual repartee. MacCowan records a woman, whom Angus had reproved, rebuking him sharply for venturing to speak to her. Angus considered this for a while and then, finding his reply, said, “I will speak of thy testimonies also before kings and will not be ashamed”.⁴⁹ There are several other anecdotes of this nature.

A still greater gift that he had was his ability in public prayer. One woman in Skye, who had been trying unsuccessfully to teach him to count, was astonished soon afterwards to hear him at a prayer meeting. “He was called upon to pray. He arose and began to pray with light, spiritual depth, and unction, and using words so well chosen and scriptural, that the woman (although she knew his voice perfectly well) was constrained to turn round and make sure that it was Angus.”⁵⁰ He was not called on to speak at question meetings, but he was frequently called on to pray.⁵¹ “In prayer his gift was remarkable. Singularly beautiful were his prayers in their extreme simplicity and spirituality, his soul seemed rapt in the joy of communion with his Elder Brother, of whose character he had such a true conception. These qualities made his

Lady Matheson’s salted paper prints than to her albumen paper ones. This, however, is a subject for an expert, particularly in the absence of the original; see James M. Reilly, *The Albumen & Salted Paper Book: the history and practice of photographic printing, 1840-1895* (Rochester, NY, 1980), Appendix C: Some Guidelines for the Identification of Albumen and Salted Paper Prints (available online).

⁴⁸ One reason for attributing an earlier rather than later date to the photograph is that Angus appears to have been in his forties when it was taken: he has a bald patch but there is no evidence of grey in his hair or stubble. If we follow Principal Macleod’s dates, he would have been into his fifties by 1860. Incidentally, the apparently misshapen nose in the photograph might well be a photographic defect.

⁴⁹ MacCowan, p. 153.

⁵⁰ Cameron, pp. 110-1.

⁵¹ Macfarlane, *Men*, p. 20.

prayers such that any Christian, however advanced, would enjoy, and find profit in joining them.”⁵²

Perhaps his greatest gift, however, was as an evangelist. Angus was continually looking at the world from a spiritual perspective, and because of his simplicity he had neither the ability nor the wish to hide his thoughts. “His face was like that of a child’s, so perfectly guileless, and was a true index to what might be at the time the feeling of his heart.”⁵³ The result was that, under the Divine sovereignty, he was a most effective winner of souls. Writing in 1885, Murdo Macaskill said:

What wonderful results are sometimes produced through the labours of the humblest human instrumentalities, when under the continual baptism of the Spirit. Of poor witless Angus Macleod, in my native island, the testimony was born by the godly and much revered Robert Finlayson, that from careful enquiry he found that this poor witless man could claim more spiritual children in the parish of Lochs than all the ministers who had preached there in that generation. Yet this poor man was little removed naturally from absolute idiocy. But from the day grace took possession of him, till the day of his death, spiritual things so absorbed thought and attention that there was no room for aught else. He lived far more in the region of the invisible than of the visible, the facts of which were far more real to him than the objects of the visible world. His blessed Lord was to him a daily companion, with whom he conversed and communed with all the reality of a present visible person. Night and day his love for perishing men was his continual theme, and no one with whom he came in contact was allowed to escape without an answer to the question, “Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ?”. All felt when in contact with him that there was an indescribable power and influence about him, which raised him almost immeasurably above the rest of the professed followers of Christ around him, though his superiors in natural gifts and talents. It was the influence of the Holy Ghost sustaining perpetual fellowship between his soul and Christ, and so making this poor witless man the source of a mystic power and energy which none of the great and learned could command. The unction

⁵² *Sunday at Home*, p. 71.

⁵³ *ibid.*

from the Holy One rested upon him as the dew of the morning, and hence he went about carrying with him continually the sweet odour of the Name which is as ointment poured forth.⁵⁴

We feel that this aspect of Angus' life has not been remembered as much as it should have been. "He that winneth souls is wise" (Prov. 11:30). "They that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan. 12:3).

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, we have seen that the various pieces of information about Angus can be combined into a fairly coherent picture, with the exception of the dates and ages given by Mrs Bishop. We are inclined to think that he died about 1854, but we have no certainty on this matter. His name is too common, and his residential situation too uncertain, for the searching of census records to be feasible. We hope that someone with expertise on early photography will be able to shed more light on the photograph.

⁵⁴ Murdo Macaskill, "The Church's Dependence on the Holy Spirit", *Free Church Monthly*, 1st September 1885, pp. 260-2 (quoted in Macaulay, pp. 195-6).