

JOHN LORNE CAMPBELL

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John Lorne Campbell was born on 1 October, 1906, in Argyllshire, the eldest son of Col. Duncan Campbell of Inverneill, and died in Fiesole, Italy, on 25 April 1996.

He was educated at Cargilfield School (1916-20), and Rugby (1920-25), where he won respect as a Classical scholar. After spending the year 1925-6 in Europe he went up to St John's College, Oxford, where he studied Natural Science and Agriculture (1926-29), taking his BA in 1929 (MA 1933). During 1929-30 he took a diploma course in Rural Economy, and also gained practical experience as a farming pupil of Richard Tanner at Kingston Bagpuize.

In 1932 he successfully submitted a postgraduate thesis whose subject, the history of the Scottish agricultural township, revealed another string to his bow: in addition to pursuing practical, contemporary studies in the natural sciences, John had nurtured a deep interest in history, including especially Scotland's past. These humane enquiries would run parallel to, and frequently intersect with the scientific and practical agricultural concerns that equally continued to occupy him throughout his life.

While he was still at Oxford he had been studying Scottish Gaelic language and literature. He was an active member of the Gaelic Club within the University, serving as its Secretary from 1927 to 1930; and he attended the classes of John Fraser, the Jesus Professor of Celtic, on an informal basis from 1928 until he left Oxford in 1932.

In April of that year he made his first visit to Nova Scotia, where another of the principal strands in his scholarly life came to the surface. He had gone to investigate the Gaelic-speaking settlements of Highland emigrants which had built up in Canada during the later 18th and 19th centuries. On arrival he found that in addition to studying the transposition of settlement patterns and agricultural practices, there was pressing work to be done on the effects of transplantation on language and culture. In particular, he developed an increasingly keen interest in the orally preserved heritage of Gaelic song and tale. This train of thought was to lead directly to his great pioneering work in the field of sound recordings.

Meanwhile, he had been preparing for the press a volume of eighteenth-century Gaelic poetry whose appearance as *Highland Songs of the 'Forty-five* in 1933, four years before the Scottish Gaelic Texts Society issued its first volume, was a remarkable achievement on a number of counts. For one thing, there were precious few apposite models of editorial practice. For another, the poems bristled with linguistic difficulties arising from the consistency of the bardic tradition, the imperfections of the texts, and the lack of reliable and authoritative grammars and dictionaries for the period and style in question. Moreover, he was operating in a historical area studded with well-defended redoubts of misinformation on the subject of the Gaels, the Highlands and Jacobitism. Critics concurred that a major force in Gaelic scholarship had arrived - unheralded and from an unexpected quarter.

In August 1933 John went for the first time to Barra, where he quickly fell in with the coterie of Edinburgh literati and Gaelic tradition-bearers that made up Compton Mackenzie's circle, and stayed. For the next several years he collected orally-preserved folk-tales and songs from such outstanding sources as Calum and Annie Johnston, and at the same time pursued conventional archive-based research on the literary and historical sources for Highland history, combining all this with practical political campaigning action on Hebridean issues. In 1936 he edited *The Book of Barra* with Compton Mackenzie at a time when (again in partnership with Mackenzie) he was Secretary of the Barra Sea League, an innovative lobby created to agitate for the local inshore fishermen whose livelihood was being literally scooped up, in defiance of the law, by non-local trawlers (1933-38). His continuing interest in comparisons between the Old World and the New led to a further trip to Nova Scotia in 1937, which enabled him to investigate in greater detail questions of cultural dislocation and continuity. Again, comparisons of Highland conditions with those in Scandinavia underpinned the typically forthright and far-sighted report entitled 'Act Now for the Highlands and Islands' which he wrote with Sir Alexander MacEwen in 1939.

In 1934, on one of his collecting trips to South Uist, John met the musicologist and photographer Margaret Fay Shaw, who was then living in Glendale, South Lochboisdale. Their marriage the following year initiated a scholarly partnership of extraordinary creativity, productivity, and longevity. In 1938 the Campbells bought the Island of Canna, which happened, providentially, to come on the market at that time. John saw Canna as an estate which could be managed by a combination of sound agricultural, ecological and humane principles, and promptly became a Highland farmer with a difference. He and Margaret made Canna House a centre of scholarship and scientific observation, music, hospitality and community leadership for well over half a century.

There followed also a stream of publications - most notably the three-volume classic *Hebridean Folksongs* (1969-81, with Francis Collinson); *Gaelic in Scottish Education and Life* (1945, reprinted 1950); a biography (1954) and an edition of the poetry (1965) of Father Allan MacDonald of Eriskay; *Gaelic Words and Expressions from South Uist and Eriskay* (1959); *Edward Lhuyd in the Scottish Highlands* (1963, with Derick Thomson); *Canna: the History of an Island* (1984); and a mature return to the question of continuity and development of oral tradition in emigrant communities in the

form of *Songs Remembered in Exile* (1990), based on John's own recordings made in 1937 and 1953. At the same time, familiarity with Scandinavian and Irish models for action coupled with anxiety at Scottish inaction in regard to the collection and study of folk tales had led him to recording and publication in this area too. He was a founder member and moving spirit of FIOS (an acronymic based on the Gaelic word for 'knowledge'): The Folklore Institute of Scotland. These activities brought him into contact with the University of Edinburgh in the immediate post-war years when ambitious surveys of the dialects, place-names and folk traditions of Scotland were being mooted, and his advice and experience was vital during the years before a new generation of academics arrived to take up the baton in the 1950s. Edinburgh's world-famous School of Scottish Studies is the most enduring monument to those necessary trail-blazing activities.

In May 1981 Canna was gifted to the nation and given into the stewardship of the National Trust for Scotland. This was not a wholly happy experience for John and Margaret - who were to continue to live at Canna House during their life-times - inasmuch as their benign and ecologically sophisticated *régime* came under severe pressure in the accountancy-driven climate of the 1980s; fortunately, the later 1990s have brought signs of a more enlightened and sympathetic approach.

Scottish Gaelic scholarship had its Age of Titans, starting with the work of W F Skene, the Rev. Thomas McLauchlan and J F Campbell of Islay in the 1860s and ending with the death of Professor Donald Mackinnon in 1914. Its Olympians were the senior scholars between the Wars: W J Watson at Edinburgh, John Fraser at Oxford. Between those far-off days of pioneering philological explication and primary text editions, and the diversified, specialised world of Celtic Studies today stand a small band of Heroes: Kenneth Jackson, Angus and William Matheson, the short-lived James Carmichael Watson, and John Lorne Campbell. Of these men, John was in several ways the truest to the broad vision of the earlier generations of scholars. In addition to his own literary, folkloristic and historical researches he found time to investigate and publicise the labours of other scholars whose work had not had the impact it deserved: from Edward Lhuyd around 1700 down to Father Allan at the turn of the present century. Some of his own projects - notably his projected edition of Alasdair mac Mhaighstir Alasdair - were alas uncompleted. Their completion, in the same generous spirit and to the same exacting standards as he employed, will be a responsibility and a challenge to the present generation of Gaelic scholars.

John Lorne Campbell was an 'original', the chemistry of whose contribution to Scottish life and letters can be quite well explained with hindsight by reference to his antecedents, upbringing and personal experience, though its unique consistency could by no means have been predicted. Key elements were a sturdily independent set of mind, a passionate belief in the dignity of men of all ranks, and a keen desire for justice and fair play. Humility, generosity and a lively sense of humour were also powerfully present.

WILLIAM GILLIES