

90 High Street
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Dear Mr Gillespie

TIGHAR and Duncan C M MacPherson

A few years ago, when my cousin, Colin, was 80, I put together a few photos, papers, etc about his father, Duncan MacPherson, my uncle, who sadly died in 1943 when my cousin was young. I also searched my uncle's name on the web which took me to your fascinating Tighar site. I have not browsed the site till a few days ago.

I was interested to note that you had again focused on my uncle and that you now seem to believe that Gardner Island was where Amelia died. All fascinating.

I was only 3 when my uncle Duncan died but he was much loved by my mother and she spoke about him often. I could have provided details concerning his background studies etc. if I had known you were looking. As I read your site as a guest I do not know how to contact you directly not being a registered researcher hence this letter.

Uncle Duncan's father, my grandfather, was an interesting self educated man, born in Salen, Loch Sunart, Ardnamurchan on the west coast of Scotland, where his father was the blacksmith. He married a well educated girl from Bowmore, Islay and Duncan was their first child, born in Salen on 10th November 1900 followed by two girls. The family moved to Acharacle (a few miles away on Loch Shiel) where the third girl, my mother, was born in 1907. My grandfather had been appointed as the local County Council government administrator, registrar of births deaths etc, payment of benefits, advising on roads, schools and all other matters. He also had the tenancy of the farm across the road with cattle.

Duncan was clever and got a scholarship to Hillhead school in Glasgow, going on to study medicine at Glasgow University which you already know. Either before or just after university he spent a year with the navy going to the Caribbean. He worked at Kirklands mental hospital, and Newark on Trent hospital and was appointed by the Colonial Office (a government job) in 1929 till 1933 to the Princess Margaret Hospital in Funafuti Gilbert and Ellice Islands. He married Hilda Gray in Aberdeen before he left and went on ahead to prepare accommodation for his wife who followed a few months later.

En route from Australia he was asked to go to Ocean island to treat the phosphate workers where he met and became friends with Andrew Armstrong chief of police at that time..

He continued to Funafuti in the Gilbert and Ellice islands where he received a wonderful welcome from the natives. He operated in the hospital with the help of native dressers and travelled between the islands in a yacht fitted out as a hospital. Andrew Armstrong was then appointed to the Gilbert and Ellis islands. On one occasion Sir Murcheson Fletcher, then Governor of Fiji, came in with his yacht and Duncan had to operate on his wife. He was then invited by them to be their guest in Fiji for a holiday and both Armstrong and Duncan went to Fiji where they made many friends

His wife joined him and when she became pregnant she wanted to go home to Aberdeen to have her baby and she returned to Scotland. My cousin Colin was born in Edinburgh in 1931. In 1933 Duncan got a Rockefeller fellowship to the John Hopkins in Baltimore and his wife and child were there with him there for two years.

He also took a degree in tropical medicine at Liverpool and a Diploma in Public Health in London. In 1935 he returned to Suva Fiji as Director of Fiji and Pacific services a place where he had already made good friends. His best friends were Sir Henry (a lawyer) and Lady Scott.

In or around 1938 he was on leave and visited Germany where he realized they were preparing for war. He returned to Fiji in 1939 as Pathologist for Fiji and later that year became Acting Medical Authority for the Western Pacific.

After war broke out in the Pacific he acted as surgeon commander on a boat carrying secret dispatches for the UK to New Zealand. He took ill and was treated in his own hospital where he died. He is buried in the cemetery in Suva and my sister has visited his grave and the hospital where he worked. She received a very warm welcome there. His name is also on the war memorial outside the church in Acharacle for wartime duties in the Pacific war with the Japanese.

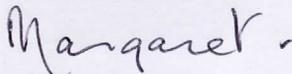
You already know most of this. But I wanted to say that he was a highly principled man who would certainly keep any papers relating to the Bones very secret. After Gallagher who had been a highly intelligent Cambridge educated young man died he wrote to the UK foreign office (also his employer) criticizing them for not preparing young officers sufficiently for their life in the tropics. An action most people would not have done.

I note that you have examined the WPHC archives in Auckland but you may not have searched special secret dispatches which would have been delivered by Uncle Duncan from Fiji for the UK between 1941 and 1943. He did not expect to die and he may have taken items relating to the bones for safekeeping to New Zealand with the agreement of others but listed them under a coded name. They already knew that the location of Fiji was vulnerable from attack. He was a very reliable and dutiful person of high integrity. He certainly would not have discarded any records.

He loved his life in Fiji and in his Scottish home in Acharacle where he had a close knit family.

His grave has Stevenson's lines "Home is the sailor home from the sea and the hunter home from the hill" on his stone.

With best wishes



Margaret Djurisc

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