

Gaelic Poetry & Song | Early Shinty



(Title Unknown) - Eoghain MacGhilliosa (Ewan Gillies)

Describes shinty being played to celebrate the New Year, likely before the game became more organised.

Nuair thig bliadhn' ùr oirnn, bi' buidheann lùthor a' cluich nan dùlain air aodann lòm; le darach làidir an làimh gach armainn, 's e cur na bàrach gu làidir teòm.	When comes the New Year, an agile band will engage in the challenge on a close-cropped plain with stout "oaks" in the hands of every stalwart, scoring goals with strength and skill.
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- Hugh Dan MacLennan, *Shinty Dies Hard*, PhD Thesis (Aberdeen, 1998)

Camanachd gur roghadh spòrs e - Shinty is the sport of choice

Camanachd gur roghadh spòrs e Àm a' gheamhraidh is tùs an earraich Mach 'san achadh 's gilleann greannmhor An deagh ghleus ri cluich cho annamh, Nach camanachd bu dual d'ar sinnsir, Ag iomain bhall air Là Callainn, C'àit 'eil coimeas ris 'san Eòrpa, H-uile fear cho eudmhor ealamh Dol ga dhubhlan bhuidhinn tadhail.	Shinty is the sport of choice In wintertime and early spring Out in the field with lively lads In good trim to play so rarely, Was not shinty the custom of our ancestors, Playing shinty on New Year's Day, Where is its like in the whole of Europe? Every man so zealous and swift Meeting the challenges of visiting groups.
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- Hugh Dan MacLennan, *Shinty Dies Hard*, PhD Thesis (Aberdeen, 1998)

- Angus Morrison, *Dàin is Oran* (1930)

Irish Shinty Verse

P.J. Devlin - Irish Journalist - Pen Name, 'The Celt', in the Freeman's Journal.

Ni binnie glóir mo chamain fhéin na guth nan eun no cèol nam bàrd; 's ni binne fuaim air bith fo 'n ghrèin no pòc air ghleus a liathroid àird.	More sweet the face of my own stick than voice of birds or music of bards; and nothing, under sun, so sweetly sounds as a smack with skill on a lofty ball.
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- Hugh Dan MacLennan, *Shinty Dies Hard*, PhD Thesis (Aberdeen, 1998)

Sheas mi car tamuill
Le ioghnadh gun smalan,
a' coimhead nan fearaibh
Le 'n camain chruaidh ùr;
Gaoth tuath is clach-mheallain
'Gam bualadh 's na caraibh;
Bha 'chuideachd cho dannair
'S nach aithnichte' orr mùth'.

I stood awhile
Pleasantly surprised
Watching the men
With their hard new shinty sticks;
North wind and hail
Beating on them;
So resolute a group were they
That it made no difference to them.

Laoich chalma le 'n camain
'Gan dearbhadh 's gach bealach,
Laoich eutrom 's na caraibh
Mar cheathach nan stúc;
Cur ball anns an athair
Le luthas na dealain,
'Nuair gheibh i ri spealladh
Ri talamh 'toirt cùil.

Sturdy heroes with their camans
In action everywhere
Heroes lightly moving
Like the mist of the peaks;
The ball in the air
With the speed of lightening
When it scythes its way
To the ground

Gur bòidheach an treud iad
Air faiche le chéile,
'S iad ruith mar na fèidh
Air slèibh nam beann àrd;
A rèir cumha an fhèidhe
Bha mactalla ag èigheach;
Sud 'nis, òlaich threubach,
Nach gèilleadh gu bràth.

A fine-looking band of men
On the field together
Running like deer
On the high mountain slopes;
Like the roar of the deer
Echoes resounded;
There they are, gallant lads
Who would never yield.

O 'n dualas a lean ribh
O ghuaillibh 'ur seanair,
Bhiodh cruadalachd daingeann
Nis leanachd ri 'n àl;
Ard-inntinneach fearail,
Foinnidh, fuasgailte, fallainn;
Bhiodh suathadh de 'n fhallus
Mu'n mhal' air an tràigh.

From inherited character
From the shoulders of your grandfathers
A strong hardiness
Would now follow on to the young generation;
Proud and manly.
Hands are nimble and healthy;
The sweat of their brows
Mingling with the sand.

- Hugh Dan MacLennan, *Shinty: Some Fact and Fiction in the 19th Century*, Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness LIX (1994-1996)

Thugainn a Dh' Iomain (Come to Shinty) - Rann Iomainich (Shinty Rhyme) An Invitation to Shinty

Cesit

Freagairt

Thugainn a dh' iomain.
Ciod e 'n iomain?

Ioman chaman.
Ciod e 'n caman?

Caman iubhar.
Dè 'n t-iubhar?

Iubahr athair.
Dè 'n t-athar?

Athar eòin.
Dè 'n t-ian?

Ian air iteig.
Dè 'n t-iteag?

Iteag fithich.
Dè fitheach?

Fitheach feola.
Dè 'n fheol?

Feol dhaoine.
Dè na daoine?

Daoine naomha.
Dé naomh?

Naomh eich.
Dè 'n t-each?

Each braonach.
Dè 'm braon?

Braon sleibhe.
Dè 'n sliabh?

Sliabh a mhachaire.
Dè 'm machair?

Machair eisg.
Gu de 'n t-iasg?

Iasg dubhan.
Gu de 'n dubhan?

Dubhan beag briosgalach, brosgalach.
A ghoid an Rìgh air a Bhanruinn.

Falbh fhein
Gearr leum
'S thoir bhuaith e.

Question

Response

Come to shinty.
What shinty?

Shinty of clubs.
What club?

Clubs of yew.
What yew?

Yew of air.
What air?

Air of bird.
What bird?

Bird on wing.
What wing?

Raven's wing.
What raven?

Raven of flesh.
What flesh?

Flesh of man.
What men?

Holy men.
What Holiness?

Holiness of Horse.
What horse?

Horse of water.
What water?

Water of hill.
What hill?

Hill of machar.
What machar?

Machar of fish.
What fish?

Fish of hook.
What hook?

A little bobbing, alluring (?) hook.
That the King stole from the Queen.

Go yourself
Give a leap
And take it from him.

Cluith-bhall Chluainidh (early 19th century) - Donald Macpherson

'S i mhire 'chuir an Nollaig oirnn
Cha d' rinn i idir domail oirnn.
Bha subhachas, bha somaltas,
Bha comuntas, mu' n d' fhalbh i.

The sport we had at Christmas
Did not do us any harm.
There was merriment and abundance,
There was fellowship before it was over.

Ceud buaidh 'Thighearna Chluaini!
Gur suairc' an Ceann-cinnidh e;
'S e 'lìonas na cuachan
Do 'n tuath 's do'n luchd leanmhuinn.

Success to the Laird of Cluny,
That generous chief,
It is he who fills the drinking cups
For his tenants and followers.

'Nuair thairnear 'fheara cròdha
Air cònard gu iomaineachd,
Cha tig an seisean comhla,
'San 'Eorp', air son calmachd.

When his hardy men are lead down
To the field for camanachd
Such a band will not come together
In Europe for bravery.

Gur luaith iad nan gluasaid
Na 'n ruadh, anns na firichean,
'S na mial-choin ga ruagadh,
Feadh chruachan is gharbhlach.

They are faster in their movement
Than the deers on the moors,
Pursued by the hounds,
Among the hills and rough bounds.

Bidh grudairean sgìth
'Tarruinn sìth uisg nam feadanan;
Bidh gleadhraich air piosan
'S ceòl phìob ann mu anmoch.

The distillers will be tired
Drawing whiskey from the stills,
There will be clinking of silver cups
And pipe music till late.

Le suairceas 's le ceòl,
'S tric an corn ga chur seachd ann;
'S tric slainte bhan oga
Ga 'n òl ann mu' m falbh iad.

With generosity and with music,
The drinking horn is oft passed round
Often the health of young women
Is drunk before they leave.

Translation by R. Gibson and A. Smart. This poem and other great examples relating to shinty in Badenoch can be found as part of the Shinty History Project by Rosemary Gibson and Newtonmore Camanachd Club: <http://newtonmoreshinty.co.uk/history/poetryandsong.html>

Chaidh mi 'n dè gu Blàragaidh
'S cha deach mi ann a dh'ain deoine,
'S chunna mi h-uile bean-phòsda
'S gach caileag òg a b' aithne dhomh.
B' e sin an gnothach taitneach
Bhith bruidhinn 's bhith 'g imeachd maille riu,
Ach gur e 's mò thug spèis do m' chridhe
Na gillean luath 's na camanan.

Bha cailean ann o Ceann an Loch,
Bha gruaglach ann o Cluanaidh
Bha maighdeanan o Bail' na Muic
Gu busach mar is dual doibh.
Bha cailean ann fo shùil an athar
Is cailean eile le 'n leannan,
Ach 's mò gu fad bu leamsa b' fheàrr
Na gillean cluidh aig camanachd.

Bha cailean ann an dreasan ghrinn
Le adaichean is itean unnd,
Le 'm falt 'na roll aig cùl an cinn
Is cirean ambair sticeadh ann.
H-uile caileag riamh a th' anns an sgìre
Ach is e 's dlùth do m' anam-sa
Ach 's beag a Rìgh chuir sin orm fhìn
'S mi coimhead cluidh a' chamanachd

Bha mnàthan pòsd' an sud le 'n daoine
'S le 'n cloinn uile maille riu,
Leighis Kung, gach duin' bha tinn Di-h-aoine
Is chaidh iad mach Di-Sathuirne.
Is sguir na ministirean dhe'n chath
'S cha dh' thug iad smuain air crannagan,
Ach ghabh iad thuca beagan ciall
Is thug iad uairibh air camanachd.

Sguir tuathanaich o cur na sìl,
'S treabhadh 's cliathadh achannan,
A dhorsa dhruid an gobhainn le spid
'S cha chuireadh e crudh' air each da aon.
"Bu chòir an latha so choimhead naomh,"
Ars es', "le gobhainn 's le sgallagan,
'S an crann a fhàgail anns a roan
'S a dhol gu cluidh a' chamanachd."

Is dh'fhàg an greusaich fhèin an stòl,
Is thilg e dheth a ghlaimeachan,
Ars es' "Ged 's maith an t-Eilean Dubh
'S ged 's fad' nas fheàrr an Manachainn.
Is ged bhiodh leth là orm air chall
'S ged bhiodh iad casruist' 's damanadh,
Gun déid mi choimhead mar thèid am ball
A rinn mi do 'n luchd camanachd.

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Yesterday I went to Blargie
I didn't go reluctantly
I saw every matron
And young girl I knew.
It was a pleasing business
Speaking and strolling with them,
But what warmed my heart most
Was the swift boys and the camans.

There were girls from Kinlochlaggan,
There were lasses there from Cluny.
There were maidens from Balgown
Pouting as usual.
There were girls under their father's eye
And others with their sweethearts,
But what I preferred by far
Was the lads playing shinty.

There were girls there in pretty dresses
In hats with feathers in them,
With their hair in a roll behind their heads
And amber combs stuck in them.
Every girl who was ever in the district
Except the one who is close to my heart,
But that did not bother me
As I was watching the shinty.

There were matrons there with their husbands
And their children hindering them,
Dr Kung healed each one who was ill on Friday
And out they went on Saturday
The ministers stopped arguing,
And gave no thought to their pulpits,
They allowed themselves a bit of sense
And spent some hours at the shinty.

The farmers ceased from planting,
From ploughing and harrowing fields,
The smith hurriedly closed his door
And he wouldn't shoe a single horse.
"This day should be kept sacred"
He said, "for smiths and servants",
To leave the plough in the field
To go and play shinty.

Even the cobbler left his stool,
And threw off his glasses,
Saying "Although the Eilean Dubh is good
And though Beaulie is far better.
And though I'm losing half a day,
And though they'll be bare-foot and cursing
I'm going to watch how fares the ball
That I made for the shinty players.

Bha Councillor Stark an tàillear ann
A chuir sinn stigh le 'r bhòtan,
Oir 'se an duine 's caileir ann
'S a' Chòirneal airson spòrsdan.
Ars es, "Na robh mi fhèin nam bhard
Gun dèanainn orr' na rannan-sa
Oir seach bhith bruidhinn aig a' Bhòrd
'Se 'n rud 's fheàrr an camanachd."

Bha Ian Cnoc à Cluanaidh ann
Is thuit e 's e toir cuairt ann,
"Cha ghabh sibh air na Spèidhaich
Ged 's math leam leibh a thruaghain,
Is theid an là leis an Sgìr Shios
Ged thug sibh roimh an car asda,
A' cosnadh urram ann an t-Sliabh
Air an Eilean le bhur canmanan.

Councillor Stark the tailor was there
That we elected with our votes,
For he's the most pleasant man,
And the Colonel for sports.
He said, "If I were a bard
I would write them these verses
For rather than be speaking to the Board,
The shinty is the things that's best.

Ian Cnoc from Cluny was there
And he said while walking around
You won't beat the Spey men,
Though I like you, you poor souls,
They day will go with the east end
Though you have cheated us before,
Winning respect in Newtonmore
With your camans on the Eilan.

Hugh Dan MacLennan, Shinty: Some Fact and Fiction in the 19th Century, Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness LIX (1994-1996), p.209.
Rosemary Gibson, The Caman is their Pastime from the Cradle to their Graves: Shinty in Badenoch & Strathspey 1747 – 1939, p. 64.

Òran na Camanachd (Cluidh-ball an t-Slèibh) - Malcom MacDonald, Bard of the Newtonmore Camanachd Club, (1890s)

Eisdibh gus an chluinn sibh naidheachd
'S ann mu dheidhinn na camanachd.
'S iom' baiteal cruaidh chaidh chluich 's an t-sneachd,
'O shean le 'ur sinnsireachd

Sios e! Suas e! a mhan 's an airde!
Thuirlich e is thadail e!
Tha cluidheadairean fhathast anns an t-Sliabh
Cho math 's chaidh riamh air an Eilean.

Bha gillean gasda feadh nan croitean
Do dhaoine a b' àbhaist ar comhnadh
Mac a' Phearsain luath 's Ceannadaidh cruaidh
Agus Seonaidh Mòr san t-Sroine.

Nuair chluinneas sinn guth air an Eilean
'S e shèideas milis ann ar cluais
Cha chluinn sibh nuair thig an Nollaig
Ach "am bheil thu ullamh gu dol a suas."

Chun àite far an robh iomadh baiteal
Eadar gaisgeach deas 's tuath
'S far an robh an còmhnuidh balaich sgairteal
Laidir, tapaidh agus cruaidh.

Rao'Il, 's Ailean, Eòghann is Calum
Donncha, 's Lachlann, 's Alisdair luath
Aindrea, Iain, Domhuill, 's Uilleam
Clann nan Cattan is Mhic Dhomhnuill Ruaidh

Cumaidh sinn suas an cluidh-iomain,
Cluidh is grinn 'tha fodh 'n ghrèin
'S e chuireas aighear 's sunnd air gillean
A' ruith 's a mireadh, danns' is leum.

Nuair thig oirnm fuachd 's a' gheamradh
Sneachd air beantann, 's gaoth o thuath
'S ann bhitheas na gillean òg 's an àm sin
Ag iomain-ball le camag cruaidh.

Bithidh a' chlann bheag nuair ghabhas iad buinn Glèidh'
crioman maide le ceanna crom
'S ann bliadhn' no dha, san a bhitheas na suinn
'S iad uile cruinn air Eilean

Listen till you hear the news
It is about the shinty.
Many a hard battle has been played in the snow,
By your ancestors in days of old.

Down with it! Up with it! Up and down!
It's a bye and it's goal
There are still players in Newtonmore
As good as ever went on the Eilan*

There were fine boys among the crofts
Of men who used to be our help
Swift Macpherson and hardy Kennedy
And big John of Strone.

When we hear wind on the Eilan
How sweet it blows in our ears.
You will not hear a word when Christmas comes
But "Are you ready to go up?"

To the place where there was many a battle
Between heroes north and south.
And where there were always forceful lads
Strong, courageous and hardy.

Ronald, Allan, Ewen and Callum
Duncan, Angus, Donald and Iain
Andrew, Ian, Donald and William
Cattanachs and sons of Donald Ruadh

We will keep up the caman play,
The finest game under the sun.
It is what puts high spirits and cheer in boys.
Running, playing, dancing, jumping

When the cold of winter comes on us
Snow on mountains and winds from the north
It's then the young lads will be
Driving a ball with a hard club.'

The little children when they take over from us,
Will be keeping a bit of stick with a bent head
And in a year or two the brave fellows will be
All gathered together on the Eilan

Hugh Dan MacLennan, Shinty: Some Fact and Fiction in the 19th Century, Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness LIX (1994-1996), p.209.
Rosemary Gibson, The Caman is their Pastime from the Cradle to their Graves: Shinty in Badenoch & Strathspey 1747 – 1939, p. 64.

* The Eilean, also occasionally referred to locally as The Eilan

Guma Slàn Do Na Fearaibh (Here's Good Health to the People)
- Dòmhnall Phàil, Bàrd Chinn a' Ghiùthsaidh (Donald Campbell, The Kingussie Bard)

Gu 'm a slàn do na fearaibh
Thèid thairis a' chuan
Gu talamh a' gheallaidh,
Far nach fairich iad fuachd.
*Gu 'm a slàn do na fearaibh
Thèid thairis a' chuan.

A health to the fellows,
Who'll cross o'er the sea!
To the country of promise,
Where no cold will they feel. –
*A health to the fellows,
Who'll cross o'er the sea!

Gu 'm a slàn do na mnathan
Nach cluinnear an gearan,
'S ann thèid iad gu smearail,
'Gar leantuinn that 'chuan;

A health to the goodwives!
We'll hear no complaining;
They'll follow us heartily
Over the sea.

'Us na nìghneagan bòidheach,
A dh' fhalbhas leinn còmhlaidh,
Gheibh daoine ri 'm pòsadh,
A chuireas òr 'nan dà chluais.

And the beautiful maidens
Going with us together, –
They'll get husbands to marry,
Who'll give ear-rings of gold.

Gheibh sinn aran 'us ìm ann,
Gheibh sinn siucar 'us tea ann;
'S cha bhi gainne oirnmh-fhìn,
'S an tìr 's am bheil buaidh.

We'll get bread and butter,
And sugar and tea there:
We'll experience no want,
In that bountiful land.

'N uair dh' fhàgas sinn 'n t-àit' seo,
Cha chuir iad mòr-mhàl oirnn
'S cha bhi an Fheill Màrtainn
'Cur nàire 'n ar gruaidh.

When we're gone from this country,
Our rents will be trifling;
And Martinmas will now
Bring blush to our cheek.

Gu 'm fàg sinn an tìr so
Cha chinnich aon nì ann
Tha 'm buntàt' air dol 'dhìth ann
'S cha chin iad le fuachd.

We'll depart from this region,
Where nothing will flourish, –
The potatoes are ruined,
And won't grow for the cold.

Gheibh sinn crodh agus caoriach;
Gheibh sinn cruithneachd air raointean,
'S cha bhi e cho daor dhuinn,
Ri fraoch an Taoibh-Tuath.

We'll get cattle and sheep;
We'll get wheat on the fields, –
And it won't be so dear
As the heath of the north.

'N uair a Thèid mi do 'n mhunadh,
A mach le mo ghunna,
Cha bhi geamair no duine
'G am chur air an ruaig.

When I go to the mountains,
And roam with my musket,
No keeper, or living,
Will drive me away.

Continues over-page...

Gheibh sinn sìod' agus sròl ann
Gheibh sinn pailteas de 'n chlàimh ann
'S nì na mnathan dhuinn clò dheth
Air seòl an Taoibh-Tuath.

Cha bhi iad 'g ar dùsgadh
Le clag Chinne-Ghiùbhsaich
Cha bhi e gu diùbhras
Ged nach dùisg sinn cho luath.

*This phrase is repeated at the end of each verse.

There we'll get silk and ribbons
We'll get wool in abundance;
And the wives will make cloth
In the style of the North.

They will not arouse us,
With the bell of Kingussie;
Nor will it much matter,
Though we wake not so soon.

- Rev. Thomas Sinton, *The Poetry of Badenoch*, p.36-37.

'It was New Year's day and the parish folk met on the accustomed insh or "blar". The Captains were already known, and the first thing to do was to set up the goals (tadhal). The next thing next was to select the men with whom each captain would play (tarruing). One Captain - it did not matter which - threw his caman at the other with "Buailean ort" (here's at you) the other caught it with "Leigam leat" (I allow you), and then the first Captain caught the caman above the second's grip and the one who held the last grip had the choice of the first man, usually the best shinty player on the field, the formula being "Is leamsa Dòmhnall" - (Donald - falls to my lot) - or whatever name the player bore. The number of each side was not definite; Dr Norman has forty a side! Then the Captains tossed the caman for the first hit at the ball from the centre of the field, the formula being "Bas no Cas" (crook or straight - of the club coming first to the ground), and the second Captain then had the choice, as the club went upwards. Whichever Captain won the toss had the first hit at the ball (buaile-choilleag). The rules of the game from a moral standpoint were then declared and the game began. The game was then a matter of who was to get the ball through between the goal-posts of the other party, and when this was achieved the shout of "Thadhail e" (It is goaled) was raised and so a "leth-bhair" or one side was played.'

- *The Littlejohn Album*

'Thog an latha oirnn gu grianach, soilleir. Air na cnoic mu-n cuairt de'n Bhlàr-ruith' bha na mnathan 's na leanaban, maighdeanan na tire, uasal agus iosal, eadar dà chloich na dùthcha, ag amharc na camanachd. Chomharraicheadh a mach an taghal, agus thòisich iad air na daoine a tharruing.

"Buaileam ort, 'Alastair," arsa Dòmhnall òg. "Leigeam leat," ars' Alastair. "Is leam-sa Dòmhnall bàn Chuil-fhodair"—an aon duine 'bu shine 'bh' air an fhaiche. Thug Dòmhnall bàn ceum gu taobh, agus shaoileadh tu gu-n leumadh an dà shùil as le h-aighear. An uair a bha na daoine air an roinn—dà fhichead air gach taobh agus buideal air gachnèann de'n taghal—thilg Alastair Ruadh an caman suas. "Cas no Bas, a Dhòmhnall-nan-Gleann?" "Bas a chumas ri d' chois gu h-oidhche," arsa Dòmhnall. B' ann air Alastair a thàinig a' cheud bhuille 'bhualadh; agus air dha am ball-iomanach a shocrachadh, mar a bha e 'togail a' chlainn, ghlaodh Dòmhnall òg—"Deis dé! 'Alastair," ars' esan; "rinn sinn dearmad air cleachdadh an latha, ach 's maith an t-àm fhad 's a dh'fhaodar a leasachadh. Thig air d'adhart, 'Eòghain bhàin, agus aithris riaghailtean na h-iomanach." Chruinnich gach aon m'a thimchioll, agus thoir misg Eòghan, ann an ainm Cheann-feadhna na camanachd, agus do réir nòis an sinnsireachd, connsachadh no trod, focal àrd no mionnan, buille no dòrn, caonnag no misg, agus bhrosnaich e iad gu farpais chàirdeil, co-strì dhuineil, fhearail, gun bhacag, gun cheap-tuislidh.

Bhuail Alastair a' cheud bhuille, agus thòisich a' chamanachd. Ach cha-n 'eil cainnt agam-sa gus na thachair a chur sìos. Chaidh a' cheud taghal le muinntir an Leathair, ach ma chaidh, cha deachaidh an latha. Rùisg Dòmhnall òg 's a chuid ghillea.

- Reverend MacLeod's account of a game in Argyllshire - Hugh Dan MacLennan, *Shinty: Some Fact and Fiction in the 19th Century*, Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness LIX (1994-1996)

- An Teachdaire Gaelach, O Bhealltuinn 1829 Gu Bealltuinn 1830, A cheud leabhar, anns a bheil da theachdaire dheug (W.R. M'Phun, Publisher, Glasgow; W. Blackwood, and MacLachlan Stewart, Edinburgh: 1830), p.192.