

## Praise of Duncan Ban Macintyre

Born 20<sup>th</sup> March 1724

On 20th March 2024, Ionad Gàidhlig Dhùn Èideann (the Gaelic hub in Edinburgh) marked the 300th anniversary of the birth of the great Gaelic bard Donnchadh Bàn Mac an t-Saoir (Duncan Ban Macintyre), who had a strong connection to Edinburgh as well as his native Argyll.

Duncan Ban's native region had no school and he remained illiterate throughout his life. Initially his work was committed to memory, before being written down by the minister of Lismore and later translated into English by such notable figures as Hugh MacDiarmid and Iain Crichton Smith.

Most of his poetry is descriptive and his experience as a gamekeeper in Argyll and Perthshire in the employ of the Duke of Argyll had much impact upon his work. Possibly his greatest poem, *Moladh Beinn Dòbhrain (Praise of Ben Dorain)*, is an early ecological lament composed with a rhythm similar to ceol mor (piobaireachd). The significance of Duncan Bàn's work is such that it has been described as "the zenith of Gaelic nature poetry".

At 11.30am on a suitable dreich day, a memorial stone was unveiled in Duncan Ban's honour in Makars' Court in Edinburgh's Old Town, with support from Clan Macintyre Trust, the Highland Society of London (represented by Fiona Houstoun, trustee), Lothian Gaelic Choir and the Learned Kindred of Currie, amongst others.

The stone for Duncan Ban included a quote from his famous song *Cumha Coire a' Cheathaich (Lament for Misty Corrie)*, which laments how the corrie has lost its former beauty and vitality:

'S e mùthadh air an t-saoghal  
An coire laghach gaolach  
A dhol a-nis air faondradh

A change has come upon the world  
That the fine beloved corrie  
Should now be desolate

The unveiling was followed by a poetry reading at the Scottish Poetry Library featuring well-kent Gaelic poets Pàdraig MacAoidh, Màrtainn Mac an t-Saoir and Marcas Mac an Tuairneir, and leading academic expert Dr Anja Gunderloch.

Later that evening, there was a special concert at the Scottish Storytelling Centre featuring Mary Ann Kennedy, Gillebride Macmillan, Allan MacDonald and members of the Lothian Gaelic Choir.

