

## The McColl Stone

By Neill Malcom

John McColl, or Ian Donn, of Duror (1781-1866) claimed to be the strongest man of the parish. One day after a funeral and no doubt a few drams, he offered to prove his strength. He invited three of the young men present to follow him down the hill to the shore of Cuil Bay. His companions, by their united efforts, were unable to lift a huge stone on his back. He then, although barefooted, carried it nimbly up the slope and placed it on top of the gatepost. Local tradition recalls that Ian Donn challenged any of the younger men to carry it back again, but not one could move it. For many years the stone lay on top of the entrance to the churchyard. Visitors used it as a test of strength, but few could move it at all, much less carry it down the hill. In modern times a firm of contractors hired to repair the wall transferred the stone to a storefront in Ballachulish where it remains.

John McColl was a weaver by trade, and he is buried in Keil churchyard. [Tombstone number 13] It is an ancient and beautiful spot. Let us hope that the ruins of the chapel and the cemetery can be preserved, and perhaps the stone may someday be replaced.

This is taken from the Hugh McColl papers in the Lochaber Archives.

The stone, which has an iron ring in its top, looks as if it had started life as a weight for a cheese press. It was one of the workmen who lived locally who took the stone to Ballachulish. Later he sold it to the store owner in exchange for a pair of trousers! "The store owner has returned the stone and it will be back in its position at the entrance to the burial ground by June 2014."

