

# MYSTERY OF THE MISSING KEEPERS

THE FINAL FATE OF THE FLANNAN ISLE LIGHTHOUSE CREW REMAINS A MYSTERY EVEN THOUGH ANSWERS HAVE BEEN SOUGHT FOR WELL OVER A HUNDRED YEARS

BY RAYMOND OLIVER

The 15th of December 1900 was a cold, windswept night on the small Scottish island of Eilean Mor. Just days from the end of the first year in the new century, it seemed everything was going normally at the Flannan Isle Lighthouse. In the small office, lighthouse keepers James Ducat, Thomas Marshall, and Donald McArthur had noted the last entries on the slate in the small office. Shortly after this was done, the trio of men disappeared — never to be seen again.

First, a bit of history on the islands. Sailors feared the Flannans and with good cause. Numerous ships had foundered on their jagged coastlines, often hidden by dense fog. In the aftermath of these shipwrecks, their contents and bodies of the victims littered the shores in the vicinity.

Eilean Mor is the largest of the

Flannan Isles in the remote Outer Hebrides, off the northwest coast of Scotland. The island is one of seven islets known to locals as the Seven Hunters, around 17 miles west of the Isle of Lewis. The Flannans are named after Flannan mac Toirrdelbaig, an Irish saint, who lived in the 7th Century and was the son of an Irish chieftain, Turlough of Thomond. He made a pilgrimage to Rome, where Pope John IV consecrated him as the first Bishop of Killaloe, of which he is the Patron Saint.

He built a chapel on the island and, in death, he was said to regard Eilean Mor as his own. For centuries, shepherds used to bring sheep to the island to graze but would never stay the night, fearful of the spirits that were believed to haunt it. A sinister, watchful presence was said to reside there.

Although the island seemed the perfect place to establish a congregation, the worshipers believed in the island's supernatural power. It was an area that many still believe was a place of fairies. Because of its reputation and the superstition surrounding it, the locals adopted rituals such as circling the church on their knees. It was said there was a definite presence of an aura that undeniably shrouded the island.

According to a history of Scotland's Western Isles written in 1695, "These remote islands were places of inherent sanctity" and there was a custom that those arriving on the island would "uncover their heads and make a turn sun-ways, thanking God for their safety."

There were reports of human sacrifices at Calanais on nearby



The lighthouse provided a valuable service to mariners for decades.