

Skagfirðinga Heritage Museum Booklet no XVII

Stories

from Glaumbær

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The cover photo shows Glaumbær in Langholt, which has been the primary site of the Skagafjörður Heritage Museum since the farmhouse first opened for tourists in 1952.
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Foreword

This brochure contains a few stories either connected to *Glaumbær* or which took place there. Many are remarkable, and it's always interesting to relate a good story. It is not possible however, to deal with them all in one small brochure. *Glaumbær* has been occupied since the 10th century. Many of its occupants have been interesting to say the least, and many events have taken place which are worthwhile examining.

Some liberties have been taken in the telling of these stories, as the main purpose here is to evoke some interest, rather than to render a strict scholarly result. They are nonetheless intriguing. Pictures and sketches are widely sourced and their ownership acknowledged if they are not the author's own. Pictures of museum artifacts are not directly connected to the story's characters or events, rather are intended to give an idea of the everyday objects which the people of *Glaumbær* might have used at the times in which the stories occurred.

This booklet is the third in three part series which looks at *Glaumbær* the place and *Glaumbær* the museum. The others are: *Glaumbær, Church and Stead*, booklet VIII and *Glaumbær, Exhibit and Museum*, Booklet XI.

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Abbreviations:

SHM. Skagafjörður Heritage Museum

HjH. Hjörtur

SkA. Skagafjörður Archives

JSt. John Steinberg

SS. Sigríður Sigurðardóttir

Vineland Travellers

The first owner of Glaubær, according to the sagas, was Thorfinnur Karlsefni. The Saga of Greenlanders tells us that he bought the property at the beginning of the eleventh century, after he had returned home from his North American travels. The veracity of the Sagas of Icelanders has long been debated. Many consider Eirík's saga to be the more factual of the two, which might mean that neither Karlsefni nor his descendants had any connection with Glaumbær. That's another story.



Ásmundur Sveinsson's statue, which he called, The first European mother in America, is meant to represent Guðríður Thorbjarnardóttir with her son Snorri Thorfinnsson.

Photo by HJH. On the right is Karlsefni, a statue by Einar Jónsson which is meant to represent Thorfinnur Karlsefni Thorðarson. Photo by SHM.



Both the saga of Erik the Red and the Greenlanders' saga agree that Thorfinnur met his bride to be, Guðríður Thorbjarnardóttir, in Greenland. Thorfinnur was the son of Thórður horse-head from *Stað* in Reynines (*Reynistaður*) who was descended from the farm, *Höfði*, on Höfðaströnd.¹ His mother was Thórunn Thorfinnsdóttir from Álftafirði in the West. Thorfinnur was a successful ship's captain and trader who sailed between Iceland, Norway and Greenland. There are many remarkable stories told of him, and one would not hesitate to count him as one of the great historic personalities from Skagafjörður of early times. Guðríður is no less an exceptional personality both by historic and literary connotation. By saga accounts her father

¹ Snorri, son of Thórður who settled at *Höfði* on Höfðaströnd was Thorfinnur's grandfather.

Thorbjörn Vífilsson of Irish stock, who lived at *Laugarbrekka* on Snæfellsnes, had moved to Greenland with his family at the end of the tenth century. Guðríður was the widow of Thorsteinn Eiríksson from Brattahlíð when she and Thorfinnur met and fell in love. They were married, sailed to Vineland and lived there for a time, but left in haste due to conflict with the natives. They returned to Iceland and moved to Thorfinnur's paternal farm, *Reynistaður* in Skagafjörður. Their eldest son, Snorri Thorfinnsson, was said to be the first child of European lineage born on the North American mainland. As previously mentioned, the sagas do not agree on whether Thorfinnur and Guðríður lived at *Reynistaður* or at *Glaumbær*, or at both places. Bearing in mind some caution as to the reliability of the Icelandic sagas generally, it can be said that had these personalities at some time existed in real life. Snorri could have lived at *Glaumbær* and built a church there about the year 1030.²

Guðríður was raised as a Christian. Her parents were Christian, but most of their friends were heathen. Guðríður was unusually widely travelled for a woman of her time, and sailed the Atlantic several times between Iceland, Greenland, Vineland and Norway and walked south across Europe to Rome. Her later years were devoted to God, after having walked to Rome to make confession, and receiving absolution from the Pope. She became a nun, the first from Skagafjörður that accounts relate,³ and most certainly became an anchorite.

The descendants of Guðríður and Thorfinnur held fast to their position of power in the land. Four of them became bishops. Notable among their sons were Snorri and Thorbjörn. Thórunn (Thor)Bjarnardóttir was the mother of Björn (d. 1162) Gilsson⁴ who was third bishop at Hólar. Hallfríður Snorradóttir was the mother of Thorlákur (d. 1133) Runólfsson who was

2 Sagas of Icelanders II, 1987, p. 1109.

3 Margeir Jónsson, 1941, p. 19.

4 Margeir Jónsson, 1941, pp. 174, 187.

third bishop at Skálholt. Ingveldur Thorgeirsdóttir, Snorrason, was the mother of Brandur (d. 1201) Sæmundsson, fourth bishop at Hólar. Another descendant of Ingveldur was Halldóra, granddaughter to bishop Brandur.⁵ She was the mother of Brandur (d. 1264) Jónsson, eighth bishop at Hólar. Many other descendants of Guðríður and Thorfinnur were well known persons of influence.

Toys were made, for example, from horns, bones, shells and stones. Jawbones were cows, legbones were horses, toe bones and the coffin bone from a horses hoof were sheep, chickens, cats and dogs or “fortune tellers”. Each had their own interpretation of these roles.



The barehead outlaw

Grettir Ásmundarson stopped in at *Glaumbær* on his way out to Drangey, presumably about the year 1020. After being sentenced to outlawry, he travelled about the country with his brother Illugi. He visited with his relatives in Húna county and stayed there until winter. “Then they headed towards Skagafjörður, going north via Vatnsskarð, then to Reykjaskarð, down into Sæmundarhlíð and over to Langholt. They arrived at *Glaumbær* in the late afternoon. Grettir had tossed his hat over his shoulder. He walked that way outdoors in all weather, better or worse.”⁶ It is not stated whether they accepted hospitality at *Glaumbær*, but from there they went on to *Reynistaður* and stayed the night.

5 Halldóra was a granddaughter to Guðrún Brandsdóttir and Arnór Kolbeinson (of the Ásbjörn family). Halldóra's husband, father of Brandur the younger, was Jón Sigmundsson.

6 *Íslendinga sögur og þættir II*, Grettis saga, 1987, p. 1061.

Shortly after the brothers departed from Glaumbær: “they were met by a man with a large head, tall and lean and poorly dressed. He greeted them, and each asked of the other their name. He introduced himself as Thorbjörn. He was a hermit, too lazy to work and given to boasting. People frequently made fun of him and some treated him with derision. He struck up a conversation, and told them many entertaining stories about the local people. Grettir was much amused.”⁷ This man Thorbjörn wanted to join up with them, and they let him have his way. It was clear that he was used to gleaning gossip and “as he was boisterous and a great jester, he had been given the nickname, *Glaumur* (Merrymaker).”⁸ He said to Grettir, “the people at *Glaumbær* were very impressed to see you arrive there bareheaded in that storm ... whether you were as stalwart as you were impervious to the cold. Two farmers’ sons were there, of surpassing build and strength. The shepherd called them out to help with the sheep, and they felt they could barely dress adequately against the cold.”⁹ Grettir said he had seen, “a young man in the doorway as he pulled on his mittens, and another walking from the barn to the dunghill.”¹⁰ He said he had no fear of them. We cannot say with certainty whether those whom Grettir had seen were the brothers Snorri and Thorbjörn.

Leaving *Glaumbær*, Grettir and Illugi went “down to *Reyniness* and spent the night. From there they carried on down to the coast to a farm called *Reykir*. A man named Thorvaldur lived there, good farmer. Grettir asked to see him and said he would like to get out to *Drangey*.”¹¹

At this point Grettir’s saga and the Greenlanders’ saga are pleasantly in agreement, whatever the actual truth might be.

7 *Íslendinga sögur og þættir II*, Grettis saga, 1987, pp. 1061-1062.

8 Same reference.

9 *Íslendinga sögur og þættir II*, Grettis saga, 1987, pp. 1061-1062.

10 Same reference, pp. 1062.

11 *Íslendinga sögur og þættir II*, Grettis saga, 1987, p. 1062.

Knights and governors

In the thirteenth century, when the Sturla family broke the power of the clan of Ásbjörn in Skagafjörður, Hallur Thorseinsson lived at *Glaumbær*. He was of the Ásbjörn clan, and was said to have descended from the Vineland travellers. If that is the case, the same family would have held ownership of *Glaumbær* from the eleventh to the thirteenth century, and so it continued. The farm was owned by the same family from generation to generation until Hrafn Oddson, Knight and later Governor, purchased *Glaumbær* from Hallur in 1254.¹² His son Jón Korpur is said to have taken over from him, and in turn his grandson Hrafn (*Raven*). This Hrafn was known as Hrafn of *Glaumbær*, and was considered to have been the most influential person of his time in Skagafjörður. He was leader of other regional chieftains aligned against Auðun the red, Bishop at *Hólar*, who wanted to gain for himself full control over all the church property. Hrafn of *Glaumbær* could negotiate and the bishop postponed his plans. Hrafn is said to have invited 360 guests to the wedding of his daughter, Steinunn, to Bótólfur Andrésson, Governor, in the year 1342.¹³ They then took over the farm from Hrafn. Governors were the highest ranked Icelandic representatives of the King. Their presence at *Glaumbær* speaks to its significance.



An old verse about a tankard:

*The walls are turf, the tankard carved of wood
The host keeps it filled to its fullsome brim
Many have sipped its ascerbic rim.*

Regardless of who came by, nobleman, crofter or domestic, all were offered a blended drink of whey and water.

12 Margeir Jónsson, 1941, pp. 29-41.

13 Same reference.

Tankards were mugs made from wooden staves girt with wooden bands and topped with a carved lid. The one pictured here is from Merkigarður.

Wordly People

Sheriff Thorleifur Árnason lived at *Glaumbær* from 1418 until he died in 1428. He was of the fifth generation from governor Hrafn Oddson who purchased the property in 1254. The farm had been owned by descendants of Hrafn all that time.

Thorleifur was married to Vatnsfjarðar-Kristín, the well known daughter of the Jerusalem travellers, Solveig Thorsteinsdóttir and Björn Einarsson, Sheriff at Vatnsfjord. That couple was widely travelled. They sailed back and forth between Iceland, Greeland, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Spain and the near Middle East. They built personal and commercial ties which their descendants later used and expanded. Kristín was an affluent woman, connected to most of the powerful families of the country, and firmly rooted in European culture. Family members at *Glaumbær* had a much broader view of the world at that time than many Europeans, for they could relate stories of both American and Asian travels. Some members of that family had personal experience with travels to three continents.¹⁴

Travels between countries were more frequent in Catholic times when people had to answer the call of the Pope, which generally meant south to Italy. Neither people from Skagafjörður nor other of their countrymen had urgent business in Rome after Luther denounced the need for people to take long and difficult voyages for the renewal of their souls. There are a few examples of people of Skagafjörður making the trek to Rome. In addition to Guðríður Þorbjarnardóttir in the eleventh century, one could mention Jón Ögmundarson, Bishop at Hólar, who made the walk in the twelfth century, and Kolbeinn Arnórsson, who farmed at *Flugumýri* and went in the thirteenth century.

14 In the fourteenth century, the church at *Glaumbær* possessed two fabulous oriental altar cloths which could reasonably be traced to family travels to those regions. (DI. *Íslensk fornbréfasafn* III, p. 564.

Sherrif Thorleifur's parents-in-law travelled to many countries and also went to meet with the Pope. Thorleifur himself was an industrious trader, often sailing to far countries. On one such trip, bound for Norway in 1420, he engaged in a sea battle with the English¹⁵, who tried to exert authority over sailings in the North Sea. When Thorleifur died in 1428, Kristín moved from *Glaumbær* west over to Vatsnfjord.

Árni, son of Thorleifur and Kristín, took over the farm when he married Soffia¹⁶, daughter of Loftur Guðmundsson the rich, at *Möðruvellir* in 1440. It is not unlikely that their connections with families of power and wealthy traders of the land, as well as travels east and west across the Atlantic Ocean would have caught the interest of seafarers and explorers who were seeking information about uncharted countries and sea routes. In memoirs left by the explorer Columbus,¹⁷ who is credited with the discovery of America, he notes that he had sailed to Iceland from Bristol in the year 1477. If he came to Iceland, there is every likelihood that he would have heard about countries to the west,¹⁸ which could have influenced his view of the world. Should he have sailed around to the west side of the country it is probable that he would have come in contact with the Vatsnfjörð family who could have told him of their travells between Iceland, Greenland and Vineland, and offered good advice.

15 *Öldin fimmtánda*, 2003, p. 31.

16 Soffia was a sister to Ólöf (the rich) Loftsdóttir. Ólöf's son Thorleifur lived with Ingveldur, daughter of Akra-Kristín. She was a daughter of Sigríður Björnsdóttir and Thorsteinn Ólafsson who were married in Hvalseyjkirkja (the church at *Kvalseyri*) in Greenland in 1408.

17 Björn Thorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 1990, p. 202. It is likely that Columbus would have come to Iceland in April 1477 and sailed west and north around the country, then east along the north coast. It is impossible to verify who he actually met here, but more than likely someone could have told him about sailings to Greenland and Newfoundland.

18 Björn Thorsteinsson and Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 1990, pp. 205, 206, 208.



It was easy to fashion utensils and containers from wood. This porridge ladle made from driftwood is of a common design which was used from the middle ages until the twentieth century. A dipper like this held half a pot and was ideal for filling the askur (a wooden bowl with lid). This one is from Malland on the Skaga peninsula.

Promises and prophecy

Thorleifur Árnason the younger, son of Soffía Loftsdóttir and Sherrif Árni Thorleifsson, took over at *Glaumbær* in 1464 and ran a large operation there for forty-five years, until his son Teitur took over in 1510.¹⁹ Teitur inherited a huge wealth of land and livestock, but he was not as financially prudent as his forefathers. The Bishops at Hólar, first the Norwegian, Gottskálk Nikulásson²⁰ and later Jón Arason,²¹ managed with ruthlessness and cunning to appropriate his assets and oust him from *Glaumbær*. It is said that Teitur tried to defend himself against the Hólar bishops and continually paid tribute to *Hofstaða-María*²² and that the *Hofstaða* church had, every year for sixteen years, been given his finest cow. In 1522 Teitur owned 34 farms, but lost them all in just a few years. When, powerless and penniless, he mounted his horse on the terrace at *Glaumbær* in 1528, he placed a curse on those who would come to succeed him. Previously Teitur had decreed that, on his leaving, *Glaumbær* be bequeathed to God and John the Baptist.²³ Rafn Brandsson, Jón

19 Teitur's brother Sigurður got the farmlands at Víðimýri.

20 Gottskálk Nikulásson was Bishop at Hólar from 1496-1520. Early in his term of office Gottskálk was nicknamed "The Grimm", for the ruthless and covetous manner in which he appropriated lands for Hólar.

21 Bishop Jón at Hólar (1522–1550) was a man of action, power and wealth, for his own benefit and that of his office. He was unrelenting in his use of power, in the manner of Icelandic chieftains of the middle ages.

22 *Hofstaða-María* (Maria of Hofstað) was a statue of the Virgin Mary belonging to the church at *Hofstaðir*, in which people placed much faith. See *Kirkjur Íslands* 6th edition, 2005, pp. 145 & 149.

23 DI. *Íslenzket fornbréfasafn* XI, pp. 775–776.

Arason's son-in-law, who lived at *Höfði* on Höfðaströnd, and wrested the lawful ownership from Teitur,²⁴ acquired the farm. Hrafn behaved like a cavalier, and rode about the district with his men. A year later he sat drinking at *Glaumbær*, and drank heavily. In the heat of the moment he provoked one of his men, Filipus by name, to a round of swordplay out on the grass. He was mortally wounded. People felt that Teitur's prophesy was not long in materializing.²⁵

In 1540, three years after Teitur's death, Bishop Jón Arason had a panel of twelve priests confirm his gift to God. On May 5th, 1550, five months before the bishop stood before his own death sentence, he made *Glaumbær* a church fiefdom, to which he added the properties *Suður-ey* (South-Isle) and *Ytri-Ey* (Outer-Isle) on Skagaströnd, as well as *Stóra Vatnsskarð* and the price of twenty milking cows.²⁶ The *Glaumbær* Church, which had previously been a farm property, became a holding of the Hólar diocese.

This washbasin, cut from stone, could also be a so-called holy water vessel which stood outside the church doors in Catholic times, in order that people could cross themselves with sanctified water before entering. The basin is of stone, found at Syðra-Vatni in Efríbyggð and is on display at Glaumbær.



The Chronicler

Gottskálk Jónsson (1524-1590) is one of the most notable priests to have served at *Glaumbær*. He was of the same noble family as his namesakes, Nikulásson²⁷ and Kænillsson from Hólar, Ólafur Rögnvaldsson and Jón 'the bald' Eiríksson. Reverse

24 Margeir Jónsson, 1941, p. 79.

25 Ágúst Sigurðsson, 1979, pp. 117-130.

26 DI. *Íslenzket fornbréfasafn* XI, pp. 775-776.

27 Bishop Gottskálk Nikulásson was his grandfather, who was nicknamed "the grim" and was said to have been highly skilled in sorcery. He wrote his spells in gilded runes in a famous book of witchcraft called, *Rauðskinna* (redskinned)

nd Gottskálk held *Glaumbær* from 1554 until his death. He was a wealthy man, owning considerable property, and was considered to be among the more influential priests of the northern districts in his time. He was a close associate of Jón Arason prior to the Reformation, and head of a delegation to Snóksdal to meet with Daði Guðmundsson in 1550, in a fruitless attempt to have bishop Jón and his two sons released from custody. Gottskálk was a well respected scholar. He wrote the so called Gottskálk Chronicles which form, in part, the foundation for the writings of Arngrímur Jónasson the learned, and Björn Jónsson's Skarðs-ár chronicles. Best known is his 'Great Dossier', one of the most noteworthy Icelandic manuscripts of the sixteenth century, moreover one of our oldest paper manuscripts. Gottskálk called it 'Sópyngja' (sweepings), or 'Dægrastytting' (diversions). It contains a variety of information, including about a hundred and sixty documents on topics such as: judgements, covenants, pledges, calculations, agreements, lists of values and many more. Most of these documents have been published in *Íslenskt fornbréfasafn* (collected ancient Icelandic writings). In the dossier there is also information from the middle ages on magical symbols, runes and dogmas, poems, verses, rhymes and riddles, mostly from the days of Catholicism, which are rarely found in other references.²⁸ For example, superstition about two evil days in each month and a curse associated with the ninth hour of the eighth day of Christmas, the sixth hour of Palm Sunday and the first hour of the first day of March.²⁹ Also in the dossier are useful descriptions on the construction and care of various altar and religious artifacts - for example, descriptions of how icons were painted and gilded.

thought to have been buried with him. Galdra-Loftur (Sorcery-Loftur) tried to raise him from the grave with incantations in 1720, as legend has it.

²⁸ See Jón Þorkelsson's discussions on Rev. Gottskálk Jónsson from *Glaumbær*, published in 1896.

²⁹ DI. *Íslenskt fornbréfasafn*, III, 1896, p. 183.

Noble sorcerers

There was one priest of whom stories were told while he was still living. That was Grímur Illugason (1696 – 1784) who was priest at *Glaumbær* from 1727 til 1784. He was considered “tough, some felt that he was versed in black magic.³⁰ At one time he was the oldest serving priest in the Northland, and was therefore nicknamed, “*gamli*”, ‘old one’. He was a contemporary of Galdra-Loftur from the Hólar School, and some considered them equally adept in sorcery. Legend has it that he and the Rev. Þorvarður from *Kviabekke*, later residing at *Fell* in Fellströnd, were at evil odds, and that they killed each other’s animals and adherents with black magic. Among those were two sons of Rev. Grímúlfur who died of uncommon causes, it was said. One of them, Gísli, died of exhaustion at the age of eleven. As the story goes, he was sent out in fine weather on *þorláksmessa* (Dec. 23rd) to check on some horses at Eyjar. A storm struck suddenly out of the north, and Gísli lost his way. He did make it as far as *Glaumbær* though, and it could be seen from his tracks that he had walked for a long time around a hitching rail for horses which was in place at that time. He was found dead there next morning. Another account says that he was in the company of another, and that they had both managed to get home worse for the wear, but that Gísli had died of hypothermia shortly thereafter. Another of Rev. Grímúlfur’s sons was Jón. He had gone with a farmhand over to *Halldórstaðabagi*, (Halldor’s meadow) and did not return. He had walked into “a quagmire up to his waist. The farmhand thought he had seen a small black sphere rolling in front of the boy, before he walked into the mire. He attempted to pull him out, but the boy begged him to ease off and not pull him apart, he was stuck that fast. With that the farmhand ran home to tell Rev. Grímúlfur. He came quickly, for it was not far to go, a very short distance south to the pasture. But when he arrived, the boy was dead.”³¹ The third of Grímúlfur’s people to suffered a mishap was his foster son

30 Jón Espólín, Einar Bjarnason, 1976, p. 55.

31 *Byggðasaga II*, 2001, p. 268.

Bjarni, who drowned in the *Glaumbær* channel one Sunday evening in mid-summer. He intended to ride his mount east across the stream, but it seemed that there were tracks leading in farther on across from a hollow bank, but landfall there was impossible. It has since been called *Bjarnabylur*, (Bjarni's pool).³² The blame for these mishaps which befell Grímúlfur's sons and foster son was placed on the priest, Þorvarður from *Fell*, who was said to have been Grímúlfur's equal in black magic.

Grímúlfur died at the onset of winter in 1784. Rev. Sigurður Árnórsson from *Malifell* (d. 1866) acquired a chest that Grímúlfur had owned. In it he discovered a secret compartment. Therein were many strange things, among these were bird claws, water rails in flour and other oddities. Sigurður burned it, calling it Grímúlfur's instruments of black magic.³³

Carved and painted chests were treasures. This beautiful trunk from Neðri-ás in Hjaltadalur, fitted with lock, is from the eighteenth century. In such chests, items were kept to which only the owner had access.



The long mass

Rev. Hannes Jónsson was pastor at *Glaumbær* from 1850 to 1873. Prior to that he had served the Breiðavík congregations, and arrived dirt poor. “At *Glaumbær* Rev. Hannes soon became wealthy. The land is good and revenue from the congregation is plentiful.”³⁴ Rev. Hannes was “amiable and the best of men. He

32 HSk. Margeir Jónsson, örnefnaskrá (catalogue of placenames), p. 2.

33 This according to Jóhann Pétursson from *Borgargerði*, 1901. *Íslenskar þjóðsögur II*, 1955, p. 201.

34 Indriði Einarsson, 1936. p. 50.

enjoyed a sip from the bottle,” said Indriði Einarsson of him. He took lessons from him from the age of eight to fourteen, as he was living at *Húsabakki* then. Rev. Hannes had a love of literature and was unsparing in his efforts to instil in his pupils the value of good books. When Rev. Hannes preached “he drew out his enunciation and was slow in delivering his message. He had a god voice,”³⁵ yet his speeches were “not especially inspiring”, said Indriði. A deep apprehension gripped the souls of the youth as they approached confirmation, but Rev. Hannes eased their fears by telling his confirmands how they would be tested, and what they needed to know for the examination. “Rev. Hannes took confirmation seriously.”³⁶ The children were required to answer a good many questions, and each must read lengthy passages. “all this in order to show the congregation that the students had learned their work well, and how spiritually mature they were.”³⁷ Rev. Hannes also served the church at *Víðimýri*, as had most other clerics of *Glaumbær*. On the first of June, 1868 he confirmed eleven children there, among them, Stefán Guðmundsson (Stefán G. Stefánsson, poet) or “Stebbi í seli (*sel* = *small farm*)”, as he was known then. Indriði Einarsson met Stefán at some event at *Víðimýri*, but he was not present at his confirmation. The ceremony took most of the day, and was since referred to as the long mass. The *Víðimýri* farmer, Jón Árnason, offered the minister some wine prior to the service, and they were both half cut when they entered the church. The priest then began the service:

And when he was well on the way to concluding, the farmer guided him out of the church so they could relieve themselves, and take a few more sips from the bottle. When the pastor resumed his place at the pulpit, he repeated the same service from the beginning, and so it went all through the afternoon ... by around six in the evening some parents were becoming

35 Same reference.

36 Indriði Einarsson, 1936, p. 50.

37 Indriði Einarsson, 1936. p. 51.

incensed over this outrage, and some of the children were crying ... a high-strung man was enraged over this treatment of his daughter. Story has it that he had left home with a new pair of mittens in the morning, but had twisted them asunder before the day was done ... time and again he threatened to remove his daughter, but ... [his wife] who was the most peaceable person kept saying: “ my good man, this will now be the last time he confirms her. This is almost over, we’ll not be making any fuss. ...As the day began to wane, sobriety returned and the pastor was able to conclude this historic event.”³⁸

That same summer Bishop Pétur Pétursson visited *Glaumbær*, along with Jón Hallsson, then Dean at Miklabær, later at *Glaumbær*. When the Bishop had concluded his business and enjoyed the hospitality of Rev. Hannes, he and the Dean, along with their attendants mounted their horses, and made ready to depart. Rev. Hannes, wanting to wish the Bishop Godspeed, called out loudly and formally, “I wish that the lord would leave this place with you”. Some who heard this snickered, but the Bishop turned in his saddle and replied, “and may he remain with you also”.³⁹



Horsehair was spun into thread and braided or twisted into rope or various cordage. Many other things were made from it, for example horse hair bags and mats, such as this crocheted floor mat with eight petaled rose from Litla-Brekkja.

Hard times also hit Rev. Jón

Dean Jón Hallsson ran a large farm at *Glaumbær* while he was there from 1874 until 1890. During his time of service he rebuilt

38 *Heima er best*, (home is best) 41st pub. (1991), p. 210. From the biography of Ingibjörg Jóhannsdóttir from *Löngumýri*.

39 Jón Sigurðsson, 1988, p. 132.

many of the farm buildings, three of them from the ground up; the north larder, the bedchamber (called Gusa) and the south living room. For the most part things went well for Jón, and people was said that he gave truth to the old adage that it made a difference whether Jón was involved, or Rev. Jón. Yet he did suffer mishaps. On St. John the Baptist's day, June 24th 1874, shortly after he took over at Glaumbær, his worker Jens Odds-son drowned in the *Glaumbær* creek. He and Rev. Jón's son Stefán, tried to cross the creek in a leaky boat which was being used as a ferry. The boat sank and Jens drowned, but Stefán managed to swim to safety.⁴⁰ Hard times were on the land. Time after time people and animals suffered, for the severe weather was unsparing.

At the beginning of summer (about April twentieth on the old Icelandic calendar) a powerful storm blew in from the north, driving sea ice into Skagafjörður bay. After this the weather became more seasonable, such that farmers who were short of hay turned their dry stock out to pasture. Rev. Jón drove all his wethers out on the *Glambær* flats, but kept his ewes at home. On May seventeenth a powerful blizzard struck with ferocious, drifting snow which continued without let-up until the twentieth of May. The bay was choked with ice, and when the storm abated, hardly a dark spot was to be seen in a world of white. When the storm hit, the men at *Glaumbær* were quick to react, and set out to bring in the sheep. They managed to gather together most of the wethers and move them west to the *Glaumbær* channel. While they were rounding up the sheep, the river had completely filled with drifting snow, and was choked to its banks with turgid slush, making it impossible to cross. The animals were therefore driven into a corral which stood on a ridge of land called, "*Selrindill*". There should have been a gate in the entrance to the corral, but it had been taken over to *Glaumbær* the previous fall and not yet returned. There was

40 *Byggðasaga II*, 2001, p. 268.

nothing with which to close the opening. Men stood there for hours guarding it, waiting for the weather to let up. They finally gave up on this as the storm increased and their lives were in peril, should they not reach home safely. There was a walking bridge across the river at *Geldingabolt*. They were half frozen and exhausted when they found it, reaching *Holt* by nightfall. Not until next day did they make their way home to *Glaumbær*. When the weather brightened up, it became clear that most of the animals had left the corral only to be driven by the weather out into the rivers and lakes. The dean had lost about a hundred and fifty wethers and other livestock. Throughout Skagafjörður there had been severe loss of animals. Records documenting the loss of livestock over the period from the onset of winter 1886 to “moving days” (early summer) indicate that area farmers had lost several hundred sheep, seventy-nine head of cattle, two hundred and four horses, and most of them in this May blizzard.⁴¹

Glaumbær Horses

The pastors at *Glaumbær* were often good horsemen, and some made a point of breeding and training good mounts. Rev. Eggert Eiríksson, who took over at *Glaumbær* in 1784 was described as, “a drinker, a poet, a man of good cheer and a superb rider,” but very covetous. “He always had good and trustworthy horses,”⁴² of which there are few stories. Such, however, is not the case for the riding horses of Rev. Jakob Benediktsson and Rev. Hallgrímur Thorlacíus who served at *Glaumbær* a century later. Rev. Jakob was “energetic, cheerful and highly skilled.”⁴³ He was pastor at *Glaumbær* from 1890-1894. Rev. Hallgrímur took over from him and held the position until 1935. Both were acclaimed horsemen.

41 Jón Sigurðsson 1998, pp, 145-146 and 148.

42 Gísli Konráðsson, 1928-1931, p. 94.

43 Þórir Bergsson, 1984, p. 49.

It was said of Rev. Jakob that he was “Iceland’s greatest equestrian of the nineteenth century,”⁴⁴ and certainly the best known horseman serving as pastor at *Glaumbær*. Rev. Jakob trained all his own horses and was a master at making them surefooted and swift, teaching them to switch their pace from full gallop to a fast amble without breaking stride. He was “considered to have been one of the first among his contemporaries to have drawn attention to the *tölt*, (a gait unique to the Icelandic horse) in fact he, more than other horsemen of Skagafjörður, taught and trained this gait over a long period of time.”⁴⁵ *Tölt* has been given various names, such as *hlaupaganur* (running tölt), *hýruspor* (sweet steps), *yndispor* (happy steps) and *undirspor* (ground steps). Rev. Jakob placed great emphasis on having his horses well mannered, well appointed and graceful in movement.⁴⁶ Several of Rev. Jakob’s renowned horses were known by name, such as *Hóla-Gráni* (Hólar-Gray) from Hólar in Hjaltadalur, *Kápur* (Cloak) from *Miðbúsar* in Blönduhlíð, *Rauður* (Red) from *Skarði* in Gönguskarðir, and *Blesi* (Blaze) from *Hraun* in Fljótir. Rev. Jakob bought three foals from *Áltagerði*, all subsequent births from the same mare, as she was superb at running the *tölt*. These Áltagerði ‘brothers’, as he called them, were: *Neisti* (Spark), *Hringur* (Circle) and *Kinni* (Cheeks), Neisti was superb at tölt, Hringur, whom Jakob trained while he was at *Glaumbær*, and Kinni whom he purchased after he had moved to *Víðimýri*. Rev. Jakob loved training good horses and his interest in promising foals was well known. The story of how he acquired *Kápur* is an example of that. He had heard that Vagn, farmer at *Miðbúsir* had a handsome, brown mantled colt of training age with an aptitude for *tölt*. He wrote to Vagn and asked to see this foal on a particular Sunday, when he intended to preach at *Víðimýri*. The service began with no sign of Vagn or his foal, but towards the end, Vagn slipped in through the door and sat down. The sermon was abruptly cut short. The pastor neglected

44 Benjamín Sigvaldason, 1950, p. 276,

45 Ásgeir Jónsson from *Gottorp*, 1946, p. 220.

46 Same reference.

to remove his vestment and hastened down the church aisle “with short, rapid steps, as was his habit, when something interested him ... his assistant followed right behind, looking for an opportunity to rescue the raiments before Rev. Jakob began to try out the new saddle horse.”⁴⁷ Thus Rev. Jakob became the owner of Kápur, with whom he never parted though he he was constantly trading and buying horses.

Rev. Jakob knew his way around Langholt when he came to *Glaumbær* in 1890. He had worked there for his relative, Rev. Halldór Jónsson during the years 1841-1846. He would have enjoyed more “independence ... than other labourers generally did at that time. And there he had access to plenty of good horses, which were his main responsibility.”⁴⁸ Jakob was in training with Rev. Halldór, as comes out in reports of them riding together to *Víðimýri* and he preached there one Sunday in Advent in 1844. “His trainee, Jakob Benediktsson, was with him. They were first cousins.”⁴⁹ On their return home when they put their horses to the test on the pond at *Geldingabolti*, and the ice gave way under them. Thanks to swift action by Rev. Halldór, both men and horses survived. After Rev. Jakob graduated in 1855, he was ordained as a priest at *Eiðir* and Hjaltastaður. During his years as a student he engaged in a great deal of trading with horses that he bought in Skagafjörður, trained and sold in the eastern regions. In this manner he had financed his studies. It was said that “the locals were in complete shock when they saw this consummate horseman standing before the altar in his robes!”⁵⁰

47 Ásgeir Jónsson from Gottorp, 1946, pp. 258-259.

48 Benjamín Sigvaldason, 1950, p. 274.

49 Jón Espólin, Einar Bjarnason, 1979, p. 55.

50 Benjamín Sigvaldason, 1950, p. 275. Rev. Jakob served at Hérað (Eastern Iceland) from 1855 until 1875. He returned to Skagafjörður and assumed duties at *Miklabar* where he relieved Rev. Jón Hallsson. He stayed there until 1895, when he returned east.



To the left is Rev. Jakob Benediktsson's son Halldór on Kápur. To the right is Rev. Hallgrímur Thorlacius on his "Blaze".

When Rev. Hallgrímur moved to *Glaumbær* in 1894, he brought two mares with him, a red and a grey. *Rauðka* and *Snerra* were both broken. "They were of medium height and compact build, but were lithe and fair to look upon. They were high energy, tölt able and swift."⁵¹ From these mares Hallgrímur raised a celebrated line "with manifold, colourful gaits, but by and large rather small in stature. Rev. Hallgrímur sold a good many riding horses throughout the area and to distant regions."⁵² He owned two horses that were never for sale. Both were red, and one of them with a blaze marking. These were lively, versatile horses. Blesi stood at stud for many years and sired numerous fine offspring for the pastor. "When Blesi was a colt Jón Pétursson offered double, and perhaps even triple value for him"⁵³, but was unsuccessful. Hallgrímur trained most of his horses himself, until, as old age set in, he enlisted the aid of the *Hátún* brothers. The horse with the blaze was the first one that *Dúddi* (Sigurjón

51 Ásgeir Jónsson from Gotorp, 1946, p. 340.

52 Same reference.

53 Same reference.

Jónasson) broke for the pastor, and said that he had been an outstanding horse, so good that he “sometimes borrowed him for riding to dances, then he had a fine mount and was very imposing.”⁵⁴ Doctor Jónas Kristjánsson at Sauðárkrókur bought a gray mare from Hallgrímur’s *Suerra*. She was never broken, but from her he raised two fine riding mares, one gray and the other red with blaze, both sharp looking, lively and sure in their paces. The one with the blaze was a playful riding horse, of slim build with a fabulous arched neck. She had a graceful, speedy *tölt* and gallop, which stood the doctor in good stead on visits to his patients. He was indeed one of the finest horsemen in Skagafjörður in his time, and an excellent rider.

The askur was in use from the middle ages to the nineteenth century.⁵⁵ They were wooden, built with staves girded with wooden bands. They had handles and a carved lid. Each had their own vessel and ate from it with spoons carved from horn. This version appeared in the eighteenth century, a “belly bowl”, as shown in the picture. This one is from Geldingabolt.



Solveig from Miklabær (*Miklabajar*-Solveig)

It may seem odd that *Miklabajar*-Solveig should play a role in the history of *Glaumbær*. Because of the great general interest in this unfortunate personality of the eighteenth century, her connection with *Glaumbær* will be addressed here. In short order, it is due to the fact that on July eleventh 1937, Solveig’s bones were buried in the churchyard at *Glaumbær*, but why? Before that is clarified, we shall first turn to events of the story which fall in this order:

1768 Rev. Oddur Gíslason took over at *Miklabær* in Blönduhlíð, Solveig was his housekeeper.

1777 Rev. Oddur married Guðrún Jónsdóttir from *Goðdalir*.

54 *Stígandi* 50 years, 1995, p. 60.

55 Same reference.

- 1778 Solveig committed suicide on April eleventh.
- 1786 On Sunday, October second, Rev. Oddur disappeared under mysterious circumstances.
- 1937 On June eleventh, Pétur Zóphaníasson telephoned Rev. Lárus Arnórsson at *Miklabær*, asking his assistance in exhuming Solveig's bones, and interring them at *Glaumbær*. The request had arisen at a seance. Rev. Lárus declined to participate.
- On the evening of June twelfth Rev. Oddur visited Thorsteinn Björnsson at Hrólfstaðir in a dream, asking him to assist with the unearthing.
- On July eleventh, what were thought to be Solveig's bones were transferred from Miklabær to Glaumbær for burial in the church's cemetery there.

Many stories have spawned from the disappearance of Rev. Oddur of Miklabær, the best known of which is the legend as recorded by Jón Árnason. As the story goes, a young lady named Solveig was employed as housekeeper for Rev. Oddur Gíslason at *Miklabær* in 1768. She became enamoured of the pastor, and wanted more than anything to have him as her husband, but in 1777 he married another. Solveig was heartbroken and determined to take her own life. Guðlaug Björnsdóttir, sister to Rev. Snorri at *Húsafell*, was at *Miklabær* at that time, and slept by Solveig to prevent her from getting up at night. During the day all the household kept watch over her. One evening at twilight, Solveig slipped out and dashed over to some turf remnants out in the meadow. Thorsteinn, one of the hired men, spotted Solveig running from the house. He went after her, but she had slashed her throat there in the turf ruins before he could reach her. When he saw the blood flowing unrestrained from her neck, he is meant to have said, "There the devil has claimed her". Solveig made no response to this, but before she expired she asked him to convey her wish to Rev. Oddur that she be buried in hallowed ground. Thorsteinn broke the news to the household, and relayed to the pastor her wish to be buried in the

churchyard. Those who committed suicide in those days were denied burial in a church sanctioned cemetery. The pastor sought permission, but his request was denied.

The night after the pastor's appeal was rejected, he dreamt that Solveig came to him and told him that since he had not secured a place for her in hallowed ground, he would not find a place there either. Solveig's body was interred in a mound outside the graveyard, some say half within its confines and half without.



It soon became apparent that Rev. Oddur would be harassed by Solveig if he were travelling alone.

Each person made a point of accompanying him from farm to farm, especially if he were riding late or alone.

Solveig's grave is east of the church at Glaumbær. There you will find this iron cross with a black plate on which is engraved: Here rests Solveig from Miklabær. Sigurður Jónasson (Dúddi) from Syðra-Skөрðungil saw to it that Solveig's grave was marked in 1984.

It was Sunday, October 1st, 1786 when Rev. Oddur rode home after services at *Silfrastadir*.⁵⁶ References state that he had stopped by at *Víðivellir* and accepted a cup of coffee there before heading home. The distance from *Víðivellir* to *Miklabær* is less than two kilometers, but Rev. Oddur never reached home. He disappeared without a trace that night. Those at home were unconcerned for him because they knew that someone was always with him if he were travelling late. The pastor had been accompanied as far as the home meadow at *Miklabær*, whereas usually he would be seen to the door and turned over to a member of his household. According to his companion, when they reached the meadow the reverend declared that he would be safe from there, and carried on alone. Later that evening, the people at *Miklabær* heard

56 The church at *Silfrastadir* is annexed to Miklabær.

someone outside, but the sounds of knocking were so unusual that no one went to the door. Next the sound came from up on the roof of the sitting room. Someone went up investigate, but before he was able to look through the window, he seemed to be drawn down again as though he were pulled from behind. People thought they heard screaming. No one dared move.⁵⁷ The next morning the pastor's horse was seen in the yard, riding crop and mittens under the saddle blanket. Everyone was taken aback, for clearly the pastor had come home, but was nowhere to be seen. A search was made of all the farms where he might possibly have gone. Thus they learned that Rev. Oddur had dismissed his companion when they reached the meadow. The search continued for days on end with no results. Most people concluded that Solveig had made good on her word and seen to it that he would not be laid to rest in a churchyard, and that she had spirited him into the mound beside her. No one searched there.

Thorsteinn, Rev. Oddur's farmhand, resolved not to stop searching until he found what had happened to his employer. Thorsteinn slept in a bed across from Guðlaug, who was both clever and clairvoyant. He prepared himself one evening, gathered together some clothing and other items that belonged to Oddur. He placed these under his pillow in the hope that the pastor might come to him in a dream. Meanwhile, he asked Guðlaug to keep watch through the night to see what might transpire. He told her not to defend him though he might act up in his sleep. They both went to bed, and he kept a light burning beside his bed. Guðlaug was aware that Thorsteinn was awake well into the night, but finally sleep overcame him. Then she saw

⁵⁷ There are variations told of this event. Some say that the pastor's son, Gísli, was sent to open the door, but that he had not dared go all the way, for he feared the dark. He went instead to the larder where his mother was portioning out food, and did not tell her of his errand. No one gave this any more thought until the next morning (see Stories of the disappearance of Rev. Oddur of Miklabær in *Blöndu* IV, pp. 64-72).

that Solveig came, holding something in her hand, but couldn't make out what it was. Solveig stepped over to the footstool in front of Thorstein's bed, for there was a dais in the sitting room. She bent over him as though she were about to brandish a weapon at his throat. At this Thorsteinn began to act up in his sleep, tossing about from head to foot in his bed. Guðlaug decided that this could not go on any longer. She got up and awakened Thorsteinn. Solveig's apparition gave ground, being unable to look into Guðlaug's eyes. There was a red welt on Thorsteinn's neck where Solveig had attempted her cut. Thorsteinn said he had dreamt that Solveig had come to him and declared that he would never be any the wiser as to what had become of Rev. Oddur. With that she had attacked him, and began to slash at his neck with a large knife. He still felt the pain after he awakened. After this Thorsteinn gave up his quest to discover what had happened to Rev. Oddur.

Little has been seen of Solveig since this occurred. Oddur's son, Rev. Gísli, who was the last pastor at *Reynistaðir* (1829-1852), had said though, that the first night he slept with his wife, Solveig attacked him so vigorously that it was all he could do to defend himself, and he was a powerful man like his father. There are no other stories told of Solveig.⁵⁸ *Miklabajar*-Solveig and Rev. Gísli now both rest in the Glaumbær church cemetery. Many find that remarkable. As in all stories, the circumstances of the affair have a tendency to become coloured by the art of the storyteller and the influence of adept writing styles. Therefore it is difficult to ascertain what is fabrication and what is the truth, but the disappearance of Rev. Oddur was and is particularly good material for poets and storytellers.

Solveig's story is powerful, whether seen as legend or as a good resource on the mindset of people of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In 1937, nearly a hundred and sixty years

58 *Íslenskar þjóðsögur og avintýri* I, (Reykjavík 1980), pp. 284-286. See also a detailed article by Sölvi Sveinsson in *Skaðfirðingabók* 15, 1968, pp. 101-104.

after she took her own life, and ten years before the last inhabitant left Glambær, her bones were buried there. Fear of ghosts and monsters had engendered compassion for a woebegone girl, and concern for her fate after death. Mysticism characterized the beliefs of those who were involved in exhuming Solveig's bones. Belief in ghosts was still in vogue, though in a different form.



Solveig's casket carried from the church at Miklabær in 1937. Left front is Thorsteinn Björnsson from Hrólfstaðir. Jóhann Lüðvíksson is second from left. Stefán Jónsson is at right front and Thorsteinn's wife Margrét Rögnvaldsdóttir is next to him. Behind her is clearly Sigurður Einarsson from Stokkþómur. The man at the end of the casket is Helgi Valdimarsson from Víkurkot. The church in the picture burned to the ground in 1973. Photo Hsk.

The reason that Solveig's remains were exhumed was that, at a seance, Solveig had requested that she be given a funeral in a churchyard. She went further, and urged specific people to participate in the task. She had secured some support in this, for Rev. Oddur appeared to Thorsteinn Björnsson from Hrólfstaðir

in a dream, seeking his assistance.⁵⁹ It was not known with certainty where Solveig was buried, for the churchyard had been changed considerably since her interment, but bones were removed from half-way under the old cemetery wall. The idea was to re-bury these bones in the church cemetery at *Miklabær*, but the pastor there would not hear of it. On the other hand he did authorize a quiet service in the church which took place on Sunday July 11th, 1937. At the close of service, the casket was borne from the church and transported by vehicle to *Glaumbær* where a crowd had gathered to escort Solveig to her grave.

There has been much speculation as to the fate of Rev. Oddur, but in a letter which Ragnheiður Thorarinsdóttir sent to Páll Sveinsson on August 6th, 1789 she writes, “and Rev. Oddur was found this spring in the creek named *Gegnir*.”⁶⁰ Why this does not come out in the legend is as strange as the story itself.

Pounds bear fruit in Turf

Mark Watson (1906-1979) was of British nobility. He was a great friend of Iceland, and travelled widely about the country. He saw through a visitor's eyes various possibilities which were not always obvious to the locals. He frequently came to Skagafjörður and had a definite influence on the evolution of folk museums of the day. In 1938 he made a monetary gift towards the restoration and conservation of the old turf house at *Glaumbær*. His contribution initiated the preservation of the home. In a booklet that was published in 1989 and again in 2006, entitled *Mark Watson og Glaumbær*, Anna S. Snorradóttir describes in a delightful way how destiny brought Mark Watson to *Glaumbær* in 1938. She says:

59 Sólvi Sveinsson, 1968, p. 119.

60 *Sendibréf frá íslenskum konum (Letters from Icelandic Women) 1784-1900*, 1952, p. 12.

We sat in silence for a few minutes, then drove into the yard at *Glaumbær*. There stood this remarkable gabled turf farmhouse, beautiful in the summer sun and dignified, in spite of an impoverished appearance and considerable deterioration. Yet the grass on the roofs was green, and a row of dormers met the eye. To put it simply, it was love at first sight! Mark Watson disappeared into the house, only to re-appear shortly to tell us excitedly that we should carry on to Akureyri, for he intended to spend the rest of the day here, and try to find a place to stay for the night. With that he disappeared again into the house. Bo Nisbeth, who knew him better than I, took me aside and said we should go for a walk, that he would calm down. He was right. When we returned after a long walk, our friend stood out in the yard, quiet, but ready to move on.⁶¹



Watson gave Iceland its first veterinary hospital, in Viðidalur in Reykjavík. Here he is seen travelling about Iceland in the mid twentieth century. Photo Hsk.

Mark Watson wanted to purchase *Glaumbær* and rebuild it in its original form. The building was not for sale. The reaction of this excellent benefactor of Skagafjörður was to send from England two hundred pounds sterling so that repairs could begin. That gift marked the turning point for the future preservation of the building. Watson had a love for all things Icelandic. He gave the

61 Anna S. Snorradóttir, 2006, pp. 13-14.

National Museum of Iceland many valuable gifts, and bequeathed the National Library with his valuable collection of books.

He was very impressed with the Icelandic horse and dog, and was the first to draw attention to the fact that these were unique breeds. Watson owned a ranch in California where he kept both Icelandic dogs and horses before 1950.

Place Names on Glaumbær Lands

Scattered widely across Glaumbær lands are interesting place names which indicate occupation by generations past, and cast light on life in the days of yore. Some attest to ancient dwellings and farming over centuries of time.

The river that flows through the *Glaumbær* property goes by various names. It is generally known as ***Glaumbæjarkvísl*** (Glaumbær tributary) but people generally simply talk about *kvíslina* (*the tributary*). In times past it was called *Djúpakvísl* (deep tributary) from the outlet to *Litla-Grafarland* where it is called *Dæld* (depression) until it reaches *Vatn* (the Lake). It is called *Húseyjarkvísl* (House island tributary) where it runs below Varmahlíð, from *Borgarú* (Hill river) to the outlet below *Geldingabolt*, where it is most often called *Holtkvísl* (Hill tributary). Above *Reykjafoss* it is called *Svartá* (Black River). This river is a large waterway, and could often be a considerable hindrance to travel, though current was not strong. *Djúpavað* (Deep ford) was a crossing below *Glaumbær*, just south of where the bridge is today. A short distance above (south of) *Djúpavað*, which was the main route for the people of *Blöndublíð* and *Hólmur* in the days before automobiles, is *Bjarnahylur* (Bjarni's pool). Bjarni, foster son of Rev. Grímúlfur drowned there one Sunday evening in mid-summer in the 18th century. There was sometimes a ferry in place on this river. The pastor at *Glaumbær* was responsible for it, but most often the resident at *Jaðar* (Edge) looked after it. The

ferry crossing was situated where the bridge is now. The ferry was first and foremost for the *Húsabakki* farms.

Glaumbæjar Isles are extensive flatlands between the *Kvísl* and the *Héraðsvötn* (regional lakes). The boundary between *Glaumbæjar Isles* and *Holts Isles* lies across from *Geldingabolt*. There is an old river crossing that runs from south-east to north-west, east of *Sandir* (Sands), where one arm of *Héraðsvötn* loops around west of *Borgarey* out to *Djúpakevísl*, across from *Langatangj*, and is called, *Krókur*. *Húsabakkevegur* (Húsabakki trail) lies, in part, along the outer bank of this channel, which lies slightly higher and drier than the surrounding land. Geographically speaking, *Glaumbæjar Isles* reach north to a point at the confluence of the *Glaumbær* tributary and *Héraðsvötn*, but generally people consider the northern boundary to be at *Kúhólmar* (Cow Islets) which lie at the southern end of *Húsabakki* marsh. *Hólmar* at *Sandir* are also part of the *Glaumbær* property.⁶²

Selrindi (Seal ridge) is a place name in *Glaumbæjar Isles* east of the tributary. The ridge appears to be an ancient river bank like *Krókarnir* (the Bends), a little higher than the surrounding land, winding its way north through the flatland from southwest to northeast. At the south end of the ridge, just outside of the *Húsabakki* trail, are the remains of a large sorting corral, the so-called *Glaumbæjarrétt*. This was the corral into which Rev. Jón Hallsson herded his sheep when the snow storm struck on the 17th of May 1887. There are references which suggest that in ancient times there were dwellings on *Selrindill*. However, archeological remains of other human activity that can be found in several places along the ridge are, for the most part unclear, and mostly of hay storage facilities. In a letter by Rev. Eggert Eiríksson from *Glaumbær* in 1830, he mentions that two centuries earlier there had been a barn or even a small abode on the ridge east of *Blákíll* (Blue creek). Rev. Eiríkur, who served

62 Rev. Gunnar Gíslason from *Glaumbær*.

for a long time as curate to Rev. Grímúlfur Illugason before taking over the post himself, said that *Selrindill* had been a rental holding belonging to *Glaumbær*, and according to the elders in Rev. Grímúlfur's time, the land value of the property was 10 to 20 hundreds,⁶³ but around 1800 the “foundation of the cottage ... had nearly sunk into the marsh”⁶⁴ due to rising levels in *Héraðsvötn* from the east, and the tributary to the west. In the Land Registry of 1760, the church property *Skógar* is mentioned, which was 20 hundreds in value, and parish records from 1842 use the name *Selrindill*.⁶⁵

In prosperous times shortly before 1858, a crofters' cottage called *Bjarnabúð* was built on *Glaumbær* property. When Finnur Finnsson and Sigurrós Vigfúsdóttir, who came from *Laugarbrekka* by *Reykjarbóll* (Varmahlíð), settled there in 1858, the name was changed. From then on it was called *Finnsbúð*. The last year they farmed there, 1864-1865, Eyólfur Ólafson and Sigurbjörg Kristjánsdóttir lived with them. They had come from *Borgarsel* but had previously also lived at *Laugarbrekka*. In 1894 mention was made of a place called, *Gunnukofi* at *Glaumbær*, and four years later the crofters' cottage, *Nýibær*. It is assumed that it was built up where *Finnsbúð* had been. *Nýibær* stood where the older manse from 1944 is located. *Nýibær* was occupied from 1898 to 1904. A small cottage stood on the same site during the ninteteen twenties. A lady named Rósa lived there, and the cottage was called *Rósukofi*. Gunnlaugur Jónasson, who was raised at *Hátún* remembered Rósa as being hospitable, and a fine person. She “improved” her hovel by insulating it with newspapers, and fed the mice that chose to live with her, from a

63 In the 17th century each (land) hundred was equivalent to the value of 2 cows.

64 Hannes Pétursson, 1982, pp. 30-31.

65 *Sýslu og sóknarlýsingar II*, 1954, p. 65; Hsk. Extrakt af Jordebogen 1760, óskráð.

small dish by the fire.⁶⁶ This hovel stood until the mid 20th century, and was last used as a sheep shed.



Gunnlaugur Jónasson (Gulli í Hátíni) cuts grass over the living room. He was very fond of the building, and saw to its care for many years, always equipped and willing. His efforts were meaningful, manifold and seldom for pay.

North of the buildings at *Glaumbær* were some small meadows with unusual names. They were on either side of the lane⁶⁷ which led north from the church and the farm buildings. To the west of the lane, where the cemetery and the parsonage are today, was **Órækja**, a wet and rather unproductive field. Across from that, in the slope beneath the lane and down to the path going to *Jaðri* was **Skarðavöllur** (fractured field), covered with knolls. There are two hypotheses on the origin of this peculiar name. One is that the field may have taken its name from the duty that rested on the farmers on the church properties at *Skarðir*, *Vatnsskarð* and *Vatnshlíð* to make hay on this field. The second explanation is that Jón skarði, as he was called, from

66 Gunnlaugur Jónasson from *Hátín*.

67 See *gamalt túnakort* (old meadow map), p. 79.

Skörðugili had hayed *Skarðavöllur*, but the former is thought to be more plausible.⁶⁸

The water source for *Glaumbær* was **Gvendarbrunnur** (Guðmundur's well) at the bottom of the slope below the church where one can still see a mound, and moisture in the field. Guðmundur (the good) Arason, bishop at Hólar (1203-1237) was said to have blessed the well.⁶⁹ Hallowed water was thought to be more healthy than unhallowed, both for the body and the soul.



Church and farmstead in winter adorment. The long building farthest right is the living room. The birch trees in the cemetery were planted in the latter part of the 20th century.

Messuklöpp is the name of a small outcropping between *Glaumbær* and *Halldórsstaðir*. It is a small rock, about a metre in height, facing east, leveling out to the west. Rumour has it that the *Glaumbær* bellringer used to start ringing when churchgoers from *Langholt* were seen to reach *Messuklöpp*, and hence the name. It was an old custom that people offered a prayer when they first sighted the church.⁷⁰ Beyond, and down from

68 Hsk. Margeir Jónsson, *Örnefnaskrá* (place name directory), p. 2, Rev. Gunnar Gíslason of *Glaumbær*.

69 Rev. Gunnar Gíslason from *Glaumbær*.

70 Hsk. Margeir Jónsson, *Örnefnaskrá* (place name directory), p. 3.

Messuklöpp was *Haginn* (the pasture) and there, to the south, known as *Glettingar*, was the pool in which Rev. Grímúlfur's son Jón is thought to have drowned.

Meðalheimur was a rental farm, owned by *Glaumbær*, and occupied periodically in earlier times. *Meðalheimur* is to the west, in the opening from Langholt, 80-90 metres above sea level. The building site is a knoll at the south extreme of the *Hátún* property. Hayfields were developed above there, but the knoll itself was left untouched, as it was very rough. A broad, high midden was situated west of the home. There is a good spring about 200 metres beyond and above the building site, from which all the buildings at *Glaumbær* and *Marbæli* take their drinking water. *Meðalheimur* was built at the time of Rev. Gottskálf Jónsson, who was pastor at *Glaumbær* from 1524 to 1590, with a 3 cow value. Land rent was three days hay cutting, fodder for one cow and sixty “álnir”.⁷¹ *Meðalheimur* fell into disuse in 1701⁷², but Rev. Eggert Eiríksson, pastor at *Glaumbær* (1784-1813) rebuilt it, as well as other rental properties, during his term of office and received recognition from the king for his efforts.⁷³ It is not known how long it was in use then, but in 1840 the *Glaumbær* pastor kept his sheep shelter there, as well as later, in the time of Rev. Hannes Jónsson. Stories have it that Rev. Eggert's renters had caught trout in lake *Meðalheimur* and died from eating it.⁷⁴

In the summer of 2007, American archeologists excavated the outcropping, and uncovered remains of a sheep shelter from the 19th century. Underneath, they found clear evidence of buildings, and, about 50 metres south of the hill, buried in soil, they found

71 DI Íslenskt fornbréfasafn XII, p. 195. (refers to a length of homespun, alin = length of forearm)

72 *Jarðabók* vol 9, 1930, p. 99.

73 *Byggðasaga II*, 2001, p. 268.

74 Gunnlaugur Jónasson, *Hátún*.

some sort of an underground house from a time prior to the Hekla eruption of 1104.

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