



APPLECROSS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Comunn Eachdraidh na Comraich

Web : www.applecrossheritage.org.uk

NEWSLETTER - NOVEMBER, 2000 Issue No. 3

APPLECROSS HERITAGE CENTRE

Progress

It hardly seems that five months have gone since the last Newsletter was completed. They have been exciting and busy for your committee. The most obvious progress has been with the building of the Heritage Centre which for some time now has been visible from the Bealach road as motorists round the corner above Keppoch. Allan Cross and his people have now completed the roof and the area available for display becomes more identifiable daily. Planning for the layout of the centre is well advanced and as this goes to press, we are considering the potential benefit of seeking independent professional advice. Membership has continued to increase, now at over seventy, and items received for our archives now number over two hundred.

The Historical Society is now a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity.

John McKeown is continuing to set up our website and we are grateful for his expert advice.

Fundraising

On 24th August, Richard Wills, one of the Trustees of Applecross Trust, gave a slide show of his trip on the London/Peking rally to a packed community hall and announced his intention of giving a share of his sponsorship money to the Heritage Centre. A handsome figure has now been confirmed and we are indebted to him for his support.

At the same time, we appealed to businesses in the area, as anticipated in the last Newsletter. Our grateful thanks are extended to those who responded so generously. Particular mention is made of Graeme Newton, a recent arrival in Applecross, who has generously volunteered to do the electrical work at the Centre for the cost of his materials!

Much still needs to be done and once our accounts for the first year of trading are finalised, we shall enter a further phase of applying to other sources. Meantime, with a shortfall of the order of L25,000 from our estimated requirements, contributions, however small, would be appreciated.

Other Activities

On 22nd July, Applecross Sports Day, Alistair McCowan and Ian Mackenzie manned a table with material publicising the Historical Society. In addition to raising funds, it was highly rewarding to experience the enthusiasm and goodwill for the Heritage Centre which was expressed by so many visitors, evidence that we are on the right lines in seeking to publicise our very special heritage.

On Saturday, 26th August, Scotland's Churches' Scheme organised a pilgrimage to Clachan at which we had a presence.

Doctors Karen Hardy and Caroline Wickham-Jones, the Directors of Edinburgh University Department of Archaeology's research project, 'Scotland's First Settlers' have produced their Newsletter 2000. We look forward to further contact with them.

Contributors

Once again, we are indebted to Ann Bishop for her continued interest. Her careful extractions from the Census records have been of great value. I have memories of the delight expressed by a lady from the English Midlands who visited our display table at Sports Day and was able to trace her grandmother's name.

On a wider front, our regular supporter, Donald Cameron, was encouraged to examine a copy of the 1891 Census records in detail and brought it back with manuscript notes in the margins giving patronymics, nicknames and relationships, the latter not obvious with married women in the absence of maiden names. Once again, the Cameron/Macnair memory has been of value in bringing cold facts to life.

Alan Gillies, true to his promise, has come up with a copy of the Declaration made by Flora Macdonald on board HMS Furnace in Applecross Bay on 12th July, 1746, together with further information. For those of us whose school and home environment made light of the two hundred years separating the '75 rising and our own childhood, the declaration is truly living history. Alan also took the trouble to come to the North Highland College study days reported below.

Gordon Cameron, whose well balanced article on the 'Pilgrimage', 'Eilthirich an la an-diugh a' lorg na Comraich', was published in 'The Scotsman' of 30th August, also continues his valuable support. Most recently he has drawn our attention to the activities of the Elgol and Torrin Historical Society and suggested a possible link. He has met Roy Wentworth who has been asked to help us with our place names. Roy's translation of the poem Coille Mhuiridh and his scholarly commentary have come to us via the Macdonalds.

It was good to see Farquhar Maclennan of Fearnbeg, son of the late Alistair, at one of our recent meetings. Farquhar sang the song on his last year's 'Blas na Sgìre' programme on Applecross.

John Kerr, FSA, and his wife Patricia from Pitlochry came to last month's meeting, having earlier in the year presented us with a number of old maps. This time John brought along copies of Pont's 16th Century work and of Gordon's 17th Century development of his survey,

both of the area including Applecross. We are grateful for their interest. Mrs. Kerr is a relative of the late, much-respected George Mackay who was farm manager here in the '50s.

On the subject of maps, following the visit of the Highland Council Archivist, Mr. R. Stewart, reported in the last Newsletter, Applecross Trust have kindly allowed him to copy nine 18th Century maps of the Estate and some other material. All have now been copied to us. We record our thanks for a most interesting addition to our possible exhibits.

Donald Cameron has presented a sea chart of the area, collected by brother Roderick on his travels. These and other items too numerous to mention are building up our collection nicely and we look forward to putting them on view.

Margaret Beaton's contact with the descendant of Rev. John MacQueen has been rewarding. Andy MacQueen, great, great, great grandson of the distinguished minister of Applecross has contacted us with an impressive family tree, tracing his ancestors' forebears. Margaret Gillies, wife of Dr. Alexander, a local man and one of our valuable contributors, is of the family and waiting patiently for me to put together a copy of the valuable document for her.

Appeal

As this goes to press, we have also prepared a note to be circulated to all houses in Applecross seeking contributions of material for the Centre. Now that the building is making progress, it is time to consider what is available and while we have every confidence that there is much more than we can accommodate, at least in the first display, recipients of the Newsletter are encouraged to contact any member of the Historical Society Committee if they have any photographs, correspondence or artefacts that may be of interest. We should be happy to accept items on loan and undertake to ensure their security.

As noted under Fundraising above, we continue to welcome financial contributions of any size!

North Highland College

North Highland College comes to Applecross

The following exciting event received coverage in the local press including this month's 'An Carrannach'.

The Heritage Centre received a boost when Catriona McCowan invited Dr. Raymond Lamb of The North Highland College, Thurso, to hold a three day Study School in October.

The School was supported by the European Social Fund and the objective was to use Applecross as a case-study for rural communities wishing to develop their heritage resources.

Applecross is rich in these, including the site of the early Christian settlement of St. Maelrubha.

Dr. Lamb and his students, including an encouraging number from the community, were supported by the strong team of John Wood, Senior Archaeologist, Highland Council; Dr. Noel

Fojut, Principal Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Historic Scotland and Dr. Ian Fisher, The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland.

Judith Fish and her helpers from the Applecross Inn catered for the students to the customary high standard.

An excursion to the Home Farm, with its Broch, was well attended and included the local school children.

The final day commenced with a visit to Clachan Church, site of the monastery and of the developing Heritage Centre.

Many ideas were exchanged and the contribution of representatives from Papa Westray, Portmahomack, Groam House Museum in Rosemarkie, Burghead and Eigg was particularly useful.

The lecturers combined their considerable expertise to confirm that Applecross had a major role in the development of Christian Scotland from the 7th Century, that the carved stones are part of a greater picture in its cultural heritage and that the site of the monastery as identified by Dr. Reeves is, indeed, at Clachan. Whether the vallum runs as described by subsequent archaeological writers is open to doubt but, as the site recovers from conifer planting now that the trees have been sympathetically removed, expert opinion is that there could be more discoveries.

The support of The North Highland College and its resources has given fresh impetus to the Applecross Historical Society's endeavours to make the rich legacy of the peninsula more widely known and the findings of the distinguished academics have confirmed the Historical Society's understanding of our heritage.

It was fine to see the local support and while it may be invidious to mention only a few of those who attended, it gave particular pleasure to see our own Roddy Maclean, Alan Gillies and Gordon Cameron all of whom made special effort to attend. It was also good to see Kenny Nelson, Area Officer for Scottish Natural Heritage who, with his colleagues, is being supportive as we look for guidance on interpretive panels for our theme 'Use of the Land'.

From the wider community, we had both Mary and Helen Murchison who brought their own expertise and, also to our great pleasure, we were able to meet our indefatigable correspondent, Mary Macdonald, her husband Murdoch and son John.

Those of you who read beyond page 2 of the June issue will know that Mary had brought to our notice the existence of a cross-slab, said to have been taken from Applecross to Cannich. Dr. Fisher of the Royal Commission of the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland expressed his opinion during his visit that the stone in question, which bears the initials of one A. M. Chisholm, had 19th Century carvings of Roman Catholic iconography. Those of us who had been thrilled by the possible connection were suitably deflated! However, as I write, the Historical Society has established that the A. M. Chisholm mentioned was Commissioner and Factor for Applecross in the time when Applecross was owned by the Roman Catholic Duke of Leeds whose wife set up a chapel on the estate grounds. Back to the drawing board or what?!

The advice of the visiting experts on the recommended way to treat the site now that the offending trees have been removed has been passed to Applecross Trust.

The advice of the representatives from other museums and heritage centres has been carefully noted and fed back to members at our last meeting. In essence, they have highlighted the need

to plan carefully to cover running costs. Many, including Mark Wringe of Sabhal Mor Ostaig, emphasised the need to tailor exhibits to available area, if necessary changing displays once or twice a year. We are truly fortunate to have the depth of expertise now available to us and the friendship extended by those who have tackled projects similar to our own, with distinction.

Finally

Our booklet continues to sell well. Let us know if you identify any further outlets.

Alison Wilkie of Alba Heritage Trust was prominent at our Study Days and also at the official opening of the new Applecross pier. She hopes to do a video of historical locations in Applecross and has been offered our support.

We look forward to your continued assistance.