

APPLECROSS HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Comunn Eachdraidh na Comraich

NEWSLETTER - JUNE, 2001 Issue No. 4

PROGRESS :

The November Newsletter reported the progress being made on the Heritage Centre building at Clachan and this has continued to the point at which the structure is almost complete with only minor matters to be finalised.

Applecross Estate Trust continues to support the project and will make a start shortly on the landscaping of the surrounding area. The old sheep fank has been cleared and the drystone wall has been repaired.

Walls of the old manse garden, which are adjacent to the path from the car park, are in need of repair and we have agreed to share the cost of such repair with Applecross Estate Trust.

Graham Newton's installation of the electrical system is well advanced and we continue to be indebted to him for his generosity in volunteering his time.

We continue to seek help for the provision of a car park and toilets at the access point to the proposed woodland walk which will give entry to the Centre in due course.

We are now able to hold our Society meetings in the building which has been admired by those who have visited, including a number of experts, and it is clear that we have a structure of which to be proud. Those of us who have difficulty in imagining the finished article when examining plans now see a building exceeding our expectations. The complete glazing of the gable overlooking the site of Maelrubha's monastery proves to have been an inspired idea and the area will be a focal point of the exhibition, giving opportunity for quietness and spiritual refreshment.

LAYOUT :

We have now decided that independent professional advice on layout, which was being considered at the time of the last Newsletter, is highly desirable and, with the promise of part funding of his fee from Ross & Cromarty Enterprise, we have recently selected Steve Tomlinson of Artisan to assist us. He was responsible for the impressive Arisaig centre and has made an immediate impact in Applecross with his infectious enthusiasm and conceptual skills.

We had been aware that the long narrow building presented layout problems if we were to create a chronological trail clockwise round the walls, a point underlined by the experts who saw our presentation at the North Highland College study days in Applecross last October. We also recognised the need to align the detail on Maelrubha with the view of the monastery site from the gable window. An acceptable solution had eluded us for some time.

Tomlinson has come up with the suggestion of two suspended screens, across the central part of the exhibition area, the first introducing the visitor to the theme of the Sanctuary and the second giving an introduction to Maelrubha, the effect being to break up the layout while encouraging the visitor to take in the interpretative panels on both sides and in either direction.

Mairi Summers from Milton, currently studying Art, has been commissioned to provide a painting to be incorporated into the 'Early Settlers' display, and the Kilbride family from Ri-Aulaidh have offered to create a fibre-glass model of the Applecross peninsula.

VISITS/VISITORS :

On 24th February, Catriona McCowan and Ian Mackenzie attended the Fifth St. Andrew's Dark Age Studies Day Conference where the subject was 'The Papar in the North Atlantic'. Well-known lecturers examined the background to the many Papa, Papay and Pabbay place names round the northern and western isles and as far afield as Iceland in a stimulating, if sometimes inconclusive, series of presentations. Included among the speakers were old friends of Applecross in Dr. Raymond Lamb, Ian Fisher of RCAHMS, Jocelyn Rendall of Papa Westray and Aidan Macdonald of the University of Cork. The latter has an ongoing interest in the Monastery site and was among the first to put up a marker about tree planting there. He has a house in Cromarty and expressed a wish to visit us in Applecross. Also at the conference were Dr. Noel Fojut of Historic Scotland, and Susan Seright of Groam House Museum.

On 19th March, Alistair McCowan and Janet Mackay attended a Highland Heritage Conference in Nairn which was supported by Highland Council. In addition to meeting people with shared interest in heritage centres, always a welcome feature of such gatherings, our representatives attended mini-lectures on services available or provided by Highland Council and on practical conservation of archives.

At the suggestion of Gordon Cameron, we invited Dr. Purser of Sabhal Mòr Ostaig to the Community Hall on 20th April. Dr. Purser is a musicologist who is developing his Gaelic at the College and attracted a good audience who enjoyed his well-researched and wide-ranging illustrated talk on St. Maelrubha. This incorporated detail about rock gongs, votive coins, bells and music, a truly eclectic offering.

It was particularly pleasant to be able to welcome Ann Bishop to Dr. Purser's lecture. She had adjusted her holiday in Applecross to take in his visit. Holiday is a bit of a misnomer as she spent her time developing her extracts of the 1861 census and in the meticulous amending of minor items in her previous work. We continue to be grateful for her support. She has agreed to the transfer of the census information to computer and both Margaret McCowan and John McKeown have been hard at work on this project.

On 15th May, we were visited by representatives from Highlands & Islands Enterprise. These included Donald MacDonald from Alligin who is a director and whose family is well-known in Applecross, and the prolific Dr. Jim Hunter, HIE Chairman, also respected in Applecross as the nephew of the gentle Donald MacColl, bard and one time head stalker at Hartfield who, with his family, is remembered with affection here. The HIE representatives expressed their pleasure with the development and commented favourably on the building.

We have been fortunate in making contact with Mrs. H. Wynn of North Yorkshire through the good offices of the Reverend David Scott. Mrs. Wynn is the daughter of the late Lord Middleton who sold Applecross to the Wills' family in 1929. She remembers Applecross in some detail, although she was very young when the family left here and she was delighted to hear that we were setting up a Heritage Centre. We are looking forward to a visit from her next month.

On Wednesday 18th July, Bob Pegg will entertain the community to an evening of Pictish harp music and story-telling, and tea will be provided. Bob is well-known for his

ability and the evening should be enjoyable. See the notice boards for details nearer the time or contact any member of the Applecross Historical Society management.

Alistair McCowan has been contacted by Mr. Adam Nicolson of East Sussex and the Shiant Islands. He has discovered a carved cross stone whose geological profile suggests that it is not native to these islands and may be from Coillieghillie. Mr. Nicolson intends to visit Applecross in the summer.

COMPUTER :

Alistair McCowan and Janet Mackay have been successful in winning an NEC PC 450 MHz computer for the Heritage Centre from BT and are to be congratulated on their enterprise. John McKeown continues to develop the Web site to a high standard and, as noted above, has incorporated census details. He proposes to display bed and breakfast information if there is demand, and interested parties are invited to contact the Historical Society.

OTHER MATTERS :

Plans for a small amount of material to be purchased for the shop are in hand and, in addition to the work being undertaken by Lesley Kilbride, there are suggestions for other items.

Readers of the *Ross-shire Journal* may have noticed a reference to Applecross in Roddy Maclean's column. He had been asked about an oral tradition that the leading love poet of the Eighteenth Century, Uilleam Ros, had met Mòr Ros of Stornoway, the beauty who prompted his best work, as she descended the stairway in Applecross House. So far, Roddy's enquiry has not been answered but it may be that in our membership there is someone else who knows the story, in which case we would like to hear from you.

Items of historical interest continue to come our way. Only yesterday, Marjory Mackenzie from Camustiel gave us an item on a preaching visit to Applecross by the Reverend Dr. James Begg in 1845. Just one year after the Disruption had seen large numbers leave the Established Church, particularly in the Highlands where the support for the Free Church was almost entire, Dr. Begg describes the scene on a rocky shore, '... approached by climbing over a precipice...'. He states, 'I question if the world, at this moment, can match such scenes as these'. It would be another two years before the people had their new church at Camusterrach (now the Church of Scotland building). Their resilience in the face of persecution is a matter of pride, part of the wider picture of strife between landowners and the people. No-one has described this struggle better than our recent visitor, Dr. Jim Hunter, whose books *The Making of the Crofting Community* and *The Last of the Free* are essential reading for those who treasure their Homeland.

John McKeown has put us in touch with Michael McDermott of North Minnesota who is a descendant of Alexander Macrae, born in Slumbay, Lochcarron on 26th September 1896. We think we have traced his mother in the 1861 census and will have contacted Michael by the time the Newsletter is available. He is not exactly a stranger. His relatives visited Toscaig recently.

In December, we submitted an article on our activities to Peter Mackenzie for the Clan Mackenzie magazine. So far, this has not borne fruit.

APPEAL :

Our request in the last Newsletter for material to exhibit in the Heritage Centre has

met with limited response although it is fine to see the distinctive paraffin lamp once used in the Fergusons' smiddy now mounted on the wall. Other material is promised and Alistair McCowan has collected a number of items.

The appeal is still open! Specifically we would like to borrow any photographs of the *Loch Ness/Loch Seaforth*, of fishing boats of any age and of crofting, road-making and other activities throughout the years. John McKeown has already scanned a number of photographs for display.

All photographs or papers borrowed will be returned to their owners.

We were pleased to receive from Ann Macrae, a photograph of her distinguished grand-uncle, Kenny Macrae FSA Scotland, in his launch at Camustiel. Thanks, Ann.

CROSS-SLAB AT CANNICH :

We mentioned in November that Mary Macdonald had brought this to our attention. We now know much more about Captain A. M. Chisholm and his involvement with Applecross. One does not tell distinguished academics what to think but we have passed our findings to Ian Fisher of RCAHM in the hope that he will be able to examine the stone.

FINALLY :

Although we have been fortunate in the quality of those who have come forward to help, we are still thin on the ground and the pace is picking up. If you have time to spare in any capacity, please get in touch with us.

Exciting things are happening and we rely on your continued support both in practical matters and financially. Help us to create a Heritage Centre worthy of the peninsula's distinguished past so that it may be better understood by those who follow us.