



Tom Devine

It was one of the Applecross Historical Society's most successful events ever ...

Professor Sir Tom Devine, one of Scotland's most respected and admired historians gave a fascinating talk on the subject of 'The Great Highland Famine: why Gaeldom didn't starve' at Applecross Community Hall.

Coming just ten days after the Referendum, and with his high public profile during the lead-up to such a momentous day in Scotland's political history, it was no surprise that he attracted such a big turnout. Almost 80 people, some of whom had travelled from the Isle of Skye, Gairloch, Inverness and Edinburgh, to listen, were treated to an intellectual but wholly accessible lecture. It was delivered the old-fashioned way: no notes, no visual aids, no PowerPoint presentations. Just a lifetime's study and accumulated knowledge, delivered in an engaging and enlightening manner.

After the talk, Sir Tom stayed to chat with the audience, and met at least one of his former students who was the lucky raffle winner of a signed copy of the historian's book *The Scottish nation: a modern history*.

The event helped raised valuable money for the Society, and it also served to raise our profile across the Highlands and Islands. Applecross Historical Society would like to record its thanks, once again, to Professor Sir Tom Devine for kindly agreeing to give the talk as he made his way around the Highlands on holiday! Thank you also to his brother James for helping to put us in contact.

As a consequence of hosting this event, we also received a number of useful documents from long-time supporter Alan Gillies, regarding famine relief projects in the Applecross

area. Among the schemes which helped provide labour and meal for the people of the district were:

- the building of a pier in Cuaig
- a road to link that pier to the township
- a path between Toscaig and Camusterrach
- an embankment around the Toscaig river to protect the crofts from flooding
- a road through the crofts of the township of Lonbain
- a boat pier at Applecross, under the direction of a mason in the service of MacKenzie of Applecross.

There were an average of 38 workmen on these projects, indicating just how the famine situation of the late 1840s affected people in the district. Women contributed, too, by making nets and stockings – once the delay in providing their materials had been addressed. *Continued on page 2...*



Reinforcement of the Toscaig River bank

Curator's Update



2014 was another successful year for Applecross Historical Society. The Heritage Centre opened for its 12th full season, and we thank the following people for once again helping out: Society directors Janet MacKay, Ruairidh Cameron, Alistair McCowan and Catriona McCowan; Jacqui Liuba; Isabel Cross; Valerie Hodgkinson; Anne MacRae; Helen Summers; and Liz Wright.

Margaret Beaton's spinning demonstrations were again a huge hit with visitors, and were greatly appreciated by the Society. We were also lucky to have Catriona Leyland through the summer, who contributed hugely in keeping the Centre open and transcribing the diaries of John 'Andy' Ferguson. Rachael Thomas from Gairloch supplied valuable volunteer curatorial support.

The Society welcomed Fiona Mackenzie as a director; the former chief executive officer of NHS Forth Valley has strong Tosaig roots and her father Ian, so influential in setting up the Society, will remain as an honorary Director.

The Tom Devine event was a huge success and a few days later the Society launched the Sgeul an Iasgaich / Remembering the fishing project.

The cuts affecting the heritage sector are making times tough for all independent museums and, as you'll see in the attached letter from the Society's Directors, we also need to find additional funds. Any support that our members can offer will be greatly appreciated. We look forward to seeing you in 2015.

News

Place Names Talk

The Curator gave a talk to the Gairloch Historical Society in November 2014 with around 30 people attending. The talk focussed on community place name mapping and how the Applecross Historical Society had carried out our own place names project www.applecrossplacenames.org.uk

Many thanks to Dr Karen Thompson, from Gairloch Heritage Museum, for inviting, feeding and hosting us!

LECTURES

International Congress of Celtic Studies

The 15th International Congress of Celtic Studies will be held in Glasgow in July 2015, and the Applecross Historical Society will have a presence as the Curator has been invited to give a short presentation about material culture and the heritage of our area. The event takes place between 13th and 17th July at the University of Glasgow.

Ancestral Tourism

At the end of February, the Curator gave a short paper to a seminar on Ancestral Tourism at the Highland Archive Centre in Inverness. Subject-wise, the short talk looked at the challenges facing 'ancestral tourism providers' in offering the best service to those (from Scotland as well as from further afield) when they visit us in search of their roots.

Continued from front cover...

In a sequence of letters that Alan provided us, there are some fascinating insights via the words of Reverend John Reid, then minister of Clachan, Applecross, on June 17th 1847:

The Inspector of Works is instructed forthwith to commence the collection of stones for the churchyard dyke as sanctioned by Captn Eliott and is strictly enjoined after the Distribution of the supplies now allotted to give meal to no one in circumstances to give his services in said work until he has wrought at least two days thereat.

One week later, there is a note to say that the people of Arrina, Fearnabeag and Fearnamore are too far away to contribute to the effort at Clachan, and so they are to be put to work clearing the entrance to the harbour at Fearnamore. Of course, late June or early July meant that there was a gap to be filled in the cycle of the year – the crops should have been growing, the lambing was done, and so on. But with the famine situation and the failure of the crops, it was a desperate time.

In early July, some of those named as recipients of relief meal are struck off the list and will receive nothing after not contributing to the work.

Between 30th July and 13th August, the Applecross requirement for meal seemed to be 40 bolls (about 5800 litres of meal, dry capacity), to be landed at Applecross Bay. The situation was dire, however, with only enough meal for one week in store (21 bolls) for 615 recipients. At the worst, 790 people received meal in May 1847.

Among those who were assigned work building a pier was one William Maxwell, a weaver in Camusteel who couldn't otherwise get work. He was, allegedly, the grave robber William Hare. But that's another story!

Sports history on the Bealach

For most of us, day-to-day, the road over the Bealach na Bà is something we have to use to get in and out of the Applecross peninsula. But start thinking about it in a sports and leisure context and it becomes something much more.

The road itself has helped to drive a number of sporting challenges and achievements, and has brought some of the most famous sportsmen of the 20th century to our area.

There is some debate about the road – when, exactly, was it constructed? Who built it? Who paid for it all? The earliest plausible reference that the Curator has found to some form of surfaced road is from a newspaper account of the arrival of MacKenzie of Applecross and his new bride in August 1826, which suggests that the tenantry of his estate met a ‘carriage’ at the summit of a newly-constructed road, and cheered the party all the way to Applecross House.

This snippet tallies with the folkloric remembrance of Ewen Kennedy (c1799 – 1873). He is commemorated in the place name Pass Eòghain, the large green swathe across the southern flank of Meall Gorm. Kennedy is supposed to have absconded from his job helping build the road as a young man and became the first to ‘conquer’ that piece of the hill.



Pass Eòghain

From there, through the Victorian era, came hill walkers and mountaineers. Then, in the early 20th century, the Bealach became one of the most iconic testing grounds for motor cars, motorcycles ... and their pilots!

It was normally a case of there and back in a stage of a Scottish Six-Days Trial starting somewhere like Strathpeffer or Inverness. Once the Coast Road opened in 1976, the circuit of the Applecross peninsula became a great day out. We now see cycling challenge events and innumerable car clubs on their way in and out of Applecross. Two of those driving over the Bealach last spring were HRH the Duke of Kent, and Sir Jackie Stewart – some readers may think he should also be prefaced HRH for winning the Formula 1 world championships!

Others who have used the Bealach as a means to further their sporting achievements and break new ground include legendary mountaineer Sir Chris Bonington, who put up a raft of first ascents climbing the cliffs and hills around the road. The Bealach na Bà – much more than a road!



Bealach na Bà Goodyear advert © British Newspaper Archive

MEMBERSHIP

Membership is a way that you can support the work of the Heritage Centre. Without your support the Heritage Centre would not be able to open its doors.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP

Yearly membership runs from 1 January for the year and is £10. You can pay 5 years in advance for £45. Gift membership is available for a single year or five-year period.

LIFETIME MEMBERSHIP

You can become a lifetime member for £250.

PLATINUM MEMBERSHIP

This is a lifetime membership at our highest level and all proceeds will be used to further the work of the Historical Society. Minimum £1000.

SPONSORSHIP

We are offering sponsorship for our display cases to run for the duration of each season. Your name, company or organisation logo will appear on the case and on the text description for the display stand. Annual sponsorship is £35 for the regular cases and £50 for the tall case in the main display room. Contact us to find out more.

DONATIONS

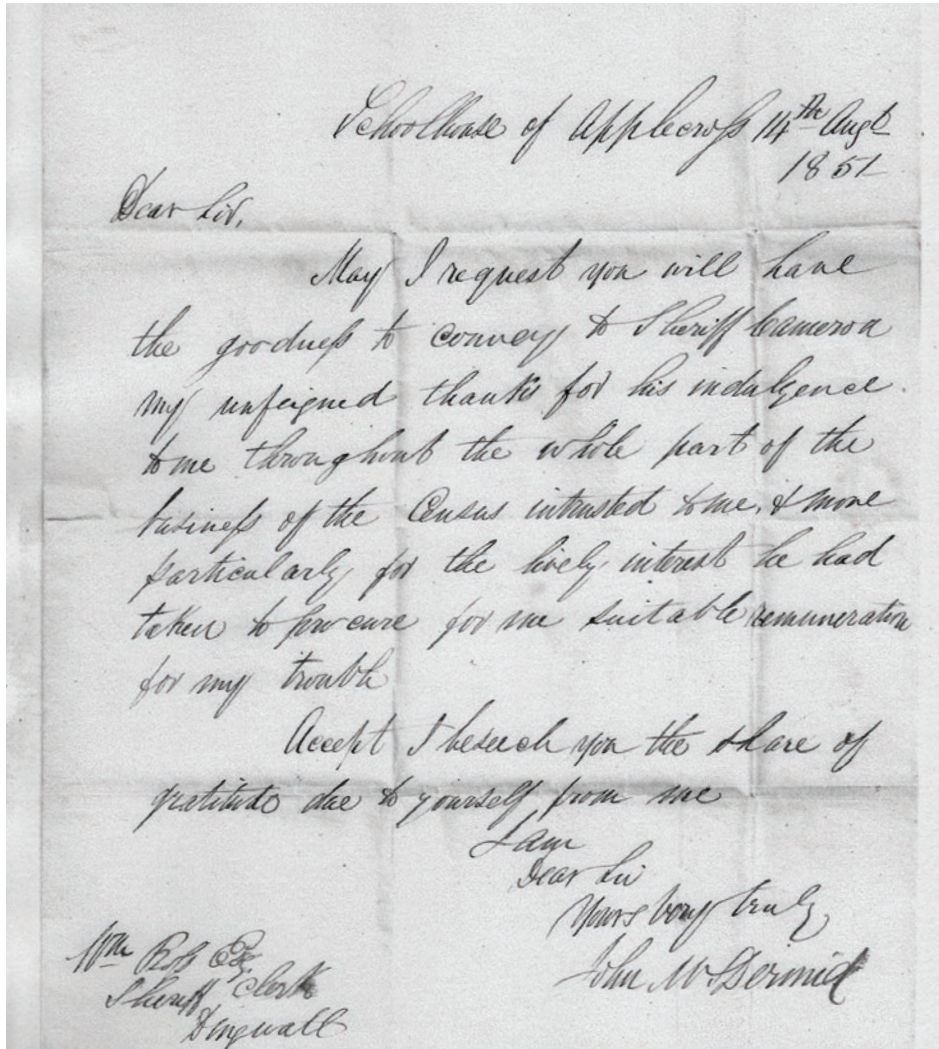
No financial donation is too small and all are welcomed to support the work of the Heritage Centre.

You can donate electronically by sending money to the Society at account number **00276354**, sort code **80-08-84**. Please give any payment a reference (for example ‘Donation’ or ‘Membership’ and include your name); email us to let us know so that we can keep an eye out and add you to our email list for newsletters.

You can also use our IBAN which is **GB47 BOFS 8008 8400 2763 54**, and the associated SWIFT BIC code is **BOFSGB21054**. We hope to implement a new online payment system soon.

John Cowell

A very well-known face across the whole of our part of Wester Ross is John Cowell. For many years, John worked at the Tigh an Eilean hotel in Shildaig, and then the Kishorn Shop and Post Office until he and his wife moved south to Lincolnshire in 2011.



Letter of thanks from schoolmaster John McDermid

One miserable October night last autumn, however, John was opening up the treasures of his philatelic collection to a select group of enthusiasts – he has accumulated a mind-boggling wealth of gems related to Applecross, Kishorn and Lochcarron. And, kindly hosted by Mark and Gillian Pattinson at Brynport Studio, he allowed the Applecross Historical Society to have a look.

Among the letters, stamped envelopes, postcards, telegrams and so on were some wonderful items which we have been able to connect with living descendants, some 150 years after pen was put to paper.

One of the letters to catch the eye was a thank you note written by the then-schoolmaster John McDermid to William Ross, Sheriff Clerk in Dingwall, who had entrusted him with the task of being census enumerator, and for arranging payment for his services.

McDermid drowned in August 1853 along with a man called William Reid, in Applecross Bay, in what we believe to have been a fishing accident. We were able to pass a copy of the letter to John's great-great-grand-nephew Jack Fergus who visited Applecross in 2011, and now lives in Brighton.

Other items included a fantastic post card of Shore Street in days long gone, and another of the area with a note on the reverse saying the sender was the first American to stay in what was then the Temperance Hotel.

OPENING HOURS FOR 2015

The **Applecross Heritage Centre** will open for its 13th season, all being well, on Good Friday, 3rd April. Initially, it will be for the three weeks of school holidays, before closing again on Saturday 25th April.

We open again on Monday 18th May and run through the season until closing on Saturday afternoon, 24th October. The Centre opens

from Monday to Saturday inclusive, between 12noon and 4pm.

Our dedicated and knowledgeable pool of volunteers keeps the Centre running, and sometimes circumstances dictate that we may unexpectedly close at short notice. Keep an eye on our Facebook and Twitter pages for any last-minute updates during the season.

Placenames

An interview with Eòghan MacKenzie in Camusteel this summer threw up some fascinating stories about his fishing career but more than a few very interesting place names, too. All the information he provided is so valuable – at least 16 names which had never been recorded before. There was so much contextual information, too: why a name might be significant, and whether there was anyone associated with a place.

One of the key lobster fishing spots Eòghan identified was A' Chreag Bhuidhe – Yellow rock – off the Camusteel shore. Lobster fishing was Eòghan's occupation when he was a young man. As a child, he would go to collect fresh water from Fuaran a' Mhannsa – The Manse well – somewhere near the Free Presbyterian Manse. In the days before a piped water supply came to the township, in the days long before the road was constructed right around from Camusterrach to Milltown via Camusteel, this was one of a number of important wells.



Eòghan MacKenzie mending nets

Among the others were Fuaran Shuas, a well in the hollow behind the original line of houses in Camusteel, and Fuaran a-bhos, which, like Fuaran Shuas, never ran dry in even the hottest weather.

An t-Sabhal Mòr is a ghost name, of sorts, as it refers to a structure now gone which was a part of An Fhaing Mhòr, a fank for the Estate sheep that existed on Camusteel ground.

Sgeir an Dotair is a name for a skerry somewhere off Camusteel which took its name from a doctor who fished there and failed to make a successful escape from rising tides.

One really intriguing name is Sgeir an Tràlair, which is near Rubha na Guailne, out by the road depot. The trawler in question was the Drusilla, apparently, which ran aground fully laden.

Locals managed to get to the stricken vessel and helped themselves to the tons of coals in its hold – this lightened the load and the ship was subsequently refloated with very little or no damage. It sounds a little like a mainland 'Whisky Galore!'



Manse painting by John (Seonan) MacDonald © Iain MacLennan

discover Applecross placenames online @ www.applecrossplacenames.org.uk

Hermione Wynn

In one little photo in the Display Room at the Applecross Heritage Centre, a well-dressed man holds his little daughter in his arms. The photograph was taken at the end of an era in the history of our area: the Middleton family had just sold their holdings in Applecross to the Wills family.

The little girl was Hermione, her father was Lord Middleton. Last summer, we were delighted to learn that Mrs Hermione Wynn was visiting Applecross after an absence of many years.

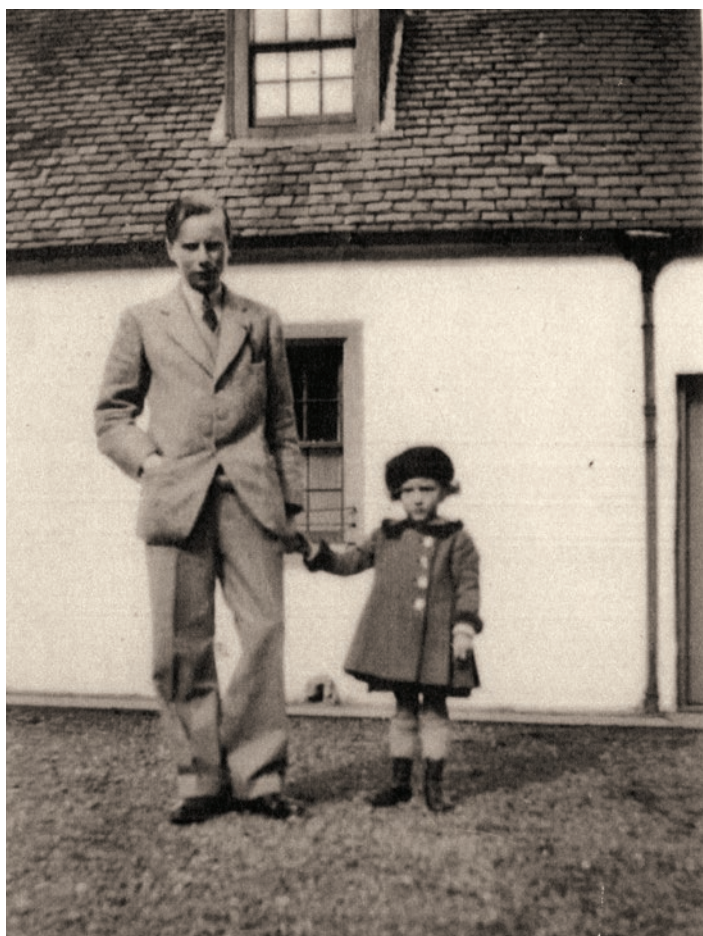
Hermione had kept in contact with Historical Society chairman Alistair McCowan, with whom she had played when they were both children. In fact,

Alistair mentioned that it was unusual, more socially aware, that Lord and Lady Middleton had been happy for their children to mix happily and freely with their contemporaries, rather than corralling them away in Interwar Britain.

The Society has copies of pictures which bring alive some of the experiences of life at Applecross House in the 1920s: Hermione, her older brother Michael, and Tormod a' Phiobaire (Norman MacKenzie) the piper, who lived on Shore Street and worked on the Estate. In some ways, that picture can be read as the last of a line of Applecross pipers which stretched far back into the time of the MacKenzie lairds.

When the Middletons arrived in 1861, a newspaper report said that a triumphal arch made of holly, other evergreens and deer antlers in the shape of an M had been erected on the Hartfield side of the bridge at Clachan; over this hung a crown and the flag of Applecross. When their tenure as owners of Applecross ended in 1929, a farewell concert was held in their honour.

We can't promise such an elaborate demonstration in 2015, but we look forward to welcoming Mrs Wynn and her family back to Applecross this summer.



Hermione Wynn in Applecross



Hermione, her older brother Michael, and Tormod a' Phiobaire (Norman MacKenzie) c.1926

visit the heritage centre website www.applecrossheritagecentre.org.uk

The Duchess of Leeds and her cross

Discovered a few years ago in a cupboard at Applecross House, following renovation work at Hartfield House, a simple but beautiful wooden cross allows us to glimpse a time of phenomenal change in the area.

In the mid -1850s, Applecross was sold by its long-term owners, the MacKenzies; their relationship with the area had been changing as the estate had passed from uncles to nephews rather than from fathers to sons. In place of what remained of the traditional Highland clan ownership structure came a new breed of wealthy 'outsiders'. The Duke of Leeds purchased the lands of Applecross, and with him came the Duchess.

We received a lot of information from Sr. Clare Veronica, Archivist for the Sisters of the Assumption, who pointed out that the Duchess had built other chapels in Braemar (1837) and Dornie (1860) as well as what became a chapel at Garden Cottage, the tied accommodation for the Applecross Estate's gardener. At the north end

of that house was a small room with a large window, a room apparently purpose-built for the Duchess to use as a place of worship, and where the cross would have sat. The Dornie chapel foundation stone was laid by Applecross Estate Factor Captain Chisholm after the party had arrived by "pleasure craft" which had the banner Ban-rìgh nam Buadh, or Queen of Victories, flying from the mast head.

The cross bears the inscription:

**The Duke & Duchess of Leeds
restored at Applecross, the Faith
of the One, Holy, Catholic and
Apostolic Church, in the Year of
our Lord 1858**

**May the Immaculate Mother of
God watch over this new mission**

Semper Fidelis

The cross, now in the Historical Society's collection, was made by the estate carpenter at the time, George Dawson.

The Duchess's priest named on the cross was Father Donald MacRae. His place in Applecross history is assured as he inadvertently played a part in the destruction of what was believed to be the last surviving standing stone which marked a boundary of Saint Maelrubha's seventh-century monastic settlement. MacRae had a habit of taking a daily walk from his residence in a flat at Applecross House to the township of Camusterrach, about three miles to the south. He used to examine the stone, and possibly sketched the markings or tried to decipher them. He was seen by a stone mason working on the Camusterrach Church of Scotland manse. This stone mason was vehemently opposed to Catholicism, and fearing that he was seeing an act of idolatry, he smashed the stone with his hammer, throwing the pieces onto the shore. The whole incident is recounted in the book 'Social and religious life in the Highlands' by the Reverend Kenneth Macdonald who wrote: "... I admit I was very much annoyed on hearing of the outcome of his misguided zeal."



Duchess of Leeds' cross



Cross stump

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Sgeul an lasgaich

Tha làn-fhios againn cho cudromach is a tha an t-iasgachd ann an eachdraidh na Comraich – an dà chuid anns na làithean a dh'fhalbh agus an-diugh fhathast, ged nach eil an uiread an sàs sa ghnìomhachas an-dràsta an coimeas ris na h-àireamhan mòra o chionn iomadh bliadhna.

Chuir Comann Eachdraidh na Comraich roimhe co-dhiù beagan den eachdraidh a chlàradh bho na daoine a bha aig an iasgachd fad iomadh bliadhna. Chaidh agallamhan a chumail ri grunnan dhiubh às a' sgìre, leithid Eòghain Mhic Coinnich agus Tormod Peutan anns a' Ghàidhlig, an cànan aca fhèin.

Chaidh na h-agallamhan a chlàradh is chuireadh dealbhan riutha, a chithear mar bhideothan beaga air an làrach: www.sgeulanasgaich.org.uk Thoir sùil air agus cùm nad inntinn gum bi barrachd stuth a' dol air san àm ri teachd.

Cluinnidh neach fiosrachadh mu dheidhinn beatha air bòrd bàt'-iasgaich agus na caractaran air an robh sinn cho eòlach anns na làithean a dh'fhalbh, mar eisimpleir Coinneach Màrtainn agus Calum Bànaidh.

'S e pròiseact dà-chànanach a tha ann an Sgeul an lasgaich a chaidh a sgrìobhadh ann toiseach anns a' Ghàidhlig is chuireadh Beurla ris às dèidh làimhe

Fhuair am pròiseact seo taic chudromach bho Bhòrd na Gàidhlig, Maoin lasgaich na h-Eòrpa, gu sònraichte Buidheann Ghnìomha lasgachd Ionadail na Gàidhealtachd (EFF / Highland FLAG), agus Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd.



Maggie Davie

We all know how important fishing has been in the history of the Applecross peninsula – both in the past and even today, although the numbers involved in the industry are much reduced in comparison to the past.

Applecross Historical Society decided to do something to record at least a little of this history from those who spent their lives and careers at the fishing. Interviews were held with a number of people, such as Eòghan MacKenzie and Norman Beaton, who spoke in their own language.

The interviews were then mixed with images and you can see the results as short videos on the project website www.sgeulanasgaich.org.uk and we hope to add more recorded material to the site as 2015 progresses.

The site tells a little about life on board a fishing boat, and about some of the characters who were so well known, such as the late Kenny Martin and the late Calum Livingstone.

A bilingual project, originally written and recorded in Gaelic, Sgeul an lasgaich received valued support from **Bòrd na Gàidhlig**, the **European Fisheries Fund**, especially the **Highland Fisheries Local Action Group**, and the **Highland Council**.



Calum Bànaidh

Collecting the stories and associated objects of the Applecross Peninsula is something that your donations and membership can go towards. Please support us to ensure that future generations have a rich and varied archive of the Heritage of the area.