

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE APPLECROSS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

- AN CUAIRT LITIR

March 2017

Issue 30

As this newsletter goes out we are busy getting the Heritage Centre ready for our 2017 opening on Saturday 8th April. We are reorganising some of the lay-out, preparing new displays and updating some of the existing displays. The mapping of Clachan graveyard which was begun by Donald Cameron and completed and put on our website by Gordon Cameron, Donald's nephew, is one topic we are focusing on. The information, now available on-line, will be printed out and put on display in Clachan Church so that all those who visit the church can see it. We hope that they might be encouraged to come over to the Heritage Centre and see what else we have to interest them.

Our WW I & II information gathering continues. In the Autumn Fiona MacKenzie attended a training event in Inverness for museums and Heritage Centres preparing displays dealing with this subject. Encouraged by this, we applied for, and obtained some funding to help us continue with this work, and to improve on its presentation. We will be working on these improvements during the coming months.

New Directors

In January Alistair McCowan informed the other Directors that he would like to ease off on his responsibilities as Chair of the Historical Society, although he would continue to be a Director and be as supportive as ever of our on-going work. Alistair has put in a huge amount of work from the very beginning to make the Heritage Centre a reality, and on through the years to ensure its continued success. We owe him a massive debt of gratitude and he has certainly earned the right to take life at an easier pace – especially as he celebrates his 91st birthday this month! We are very pleased to report that Fiona MacKenzie has agreed to step into his shoes as Chair and we are confident that she will be a worthy successor. Since Alistair made his decision to step down from his Chairmanship, he has undergone a serious bowel operation in February. I am delighted to be able to report that he is making a remarkable recovery and is, in typical fashion, constantly pushing the boundaries back to full activity again.

Sadly, Janet MacKay, another of our Founding members and Directors, has been suffering from poor health for some time, and with her full agreement, we have decided to appoint two new Directors to help us in our work. Anabel MacRae and Michael Summers were asked if they would consider stepping on board. Michael has been a member since the Historical Society was set up, and has always been ready and willing to help in any way. Annabel also has been a member since our inception, and from the time she retired to live in Applecross, has been very supportive. We were

delighted when they both agreed to take on the responsibility of becoming Directors and are sure they will be most effective members of our team. Many thanks to them both.

CLACHAN 200TH CENTENARY

This year marks the 200th Anniversary of the building of the present church at Clachan. Our Society intend to feature this special anniversary in a variety of ways, including this article for our newsletter.



As is well known, the first Christian church in Applecross was established by St Maelruba in 673. What religious practices were in place before then is a matter of speculation. We have a few sources which give us some clue as to what the pre-Christian situation would have been. W. J. Watson's "Place Names of Ross & Cromarty" gives an interpretation of the name of the north coast township, Airigh nan Cruineachd, as the Sheiling of the Cruithne – meaning the Picts and the Old Statistical Account's interpretation of the name is that it is a corruption of Airigh an Druinich – sheiling of the Druids. The Presbytery records of 1656 state concerns regarding "uther abhominable and heathenishe practices that the people in that place (Applecross) were accustomed to sacrifice bulls at a certaine tyme upon the 25 of August, which day is dedicate, as they conceive, to St Mourie as they call him". There is also a stone on the top of Beinn a' Chlachan known locally as the Druids' stone. These few records give some hint as to what these practices may have involved.

Maelrubha died in 722 and is buried in an unmarked grave in Clachan. The next Abbot of whom we have knowledge is Ruaraidh Mor MacAogan. After the Vikings sacked the monastery, MacAogan returned to the Mother House of Bangor, where he died in 801, named as Abbot of Bangor. His body was brought back to Applecross and is buried there. The large stone just by the graveyard gate marks the site of his burial.

After the death of MacAogan, Applecross was ruled by Chamberlains. The first of these lay Abbots was Obeolan who appears to have accepted the authority of Rome. He built a castle near the site of the present farm buildings and the ancient Dun. The Obeolan line was followed by the Gillandreis family. One of these, Farquhar, became Earl of Ross in the 13th century. His line ended with Gillephadrack in 1411 who died in combat at the Battle of Harlaw. Gillephadrack was known as the Sagart Ruadh. His body was carried back to Applecross after the battle and he also is buried in Clachan graveyard. Clachan graveyard truly is a place of history!

After Harlaw, King James I decreed that Applecross should remain church property, and its priests were appointed by the crown. Although the Church of Scotland Reformed was recognised by the Scots Parliament in 1560, it was not until 1690 that it was established by law as the national Church. The Reformation appears to have had little impact initially in Applecross. In 1548 a young priest, Murdoch Johnson, was serving in Applecross, but during his time, he seems to have quietly adopted the reformed religion, and equally peacefully converted the people. In 1575 he was appointed as the first minister of the reformed church in Applecross. By 1581 Applecross was officially part of the Presbytery of Lochcarron.

The next record we have of a Presbyterian minister's induction in Applecross is Aeneas MacAulay, who was appointed in 1731 and served until his death in 1760. There was a church building and a manse, but MacAulay did not live in the manse as it was in a ruinous state. It must therefore have been quite an old building by that time, as would have been the church building which was small, but considered adequate for the size of congregation. One must conclude that the majority of the population did not attend church, whether for religious reasons or difficulties of travel can only be guessed. However, if one looks at the practice of the 19th & 20th centuries when people would sail to Applecross from Raasay and Rona, as well as walking great distances to attend services, it does suggest a lack of interest in attending. The information given to the General Assembly in 1749 states that the sacrament of Communion had only been administered four times in the preceding twenty years. Yet MacAulay was a man of considerable intellect – perhaps rather more than was appreciated by his congregation. After a charge of heresy had been brought against him by Rev Aeneas Sage of Lochcarron, he was advised by the Commission of the General Assembly which tried his case, and acquitted him, to avoid obscure expressions and “not to preach above the capacity of his hearers”.

The Old Statistical Account was compiled from 1791 – at which time the Rev. John McQueen was the incumbent for the whole parish which then incorporated “Lochs & Tirdon, Kishorn and Applecross with the parish church being sited in Applecross”. Rev. McQueen's entry in the Old Statistical Account states that “the skeleton of the parish church stands in Applecross; it was condemned in 1788 but is still the only edifice for public worship in the parish.” He also comments “Close by the parish church are the remains of an old religious house, where the standard and soles of crucifixes are still to be seen. It was richly endowed with landed property, which, tradition relates to have been conveyed by the last popish missionary in the place, known by the designation of the Red Priest of Applecross (Sagart Ruadh – Gillephadrack Gillandreis) to his daughter.” This surely must be the little chapel to the north of Clachan Church. We know that the “old” church was still being used in 1792, but, so far, have no record to show if it continued to be used until the building of the “new” church in 1817. Rev. McQueen began his ministry in 1777 and continued as minister in Applecross till his death in 1831, so the new church building erected in 1817 was built during

his time. Although not a Telford church (the government money for these churches did not come through until 1826), Clachan is of a very similar design, although it has more windows – most Telford churches only have two windows spaced between the two doors.

This government/crown influence was to prove the sore that erupted into the Disruption of 1843 when a very large body of ministers, elders and congregations left the Church of Scotland, forming the Free Church. One main cause for dissatisfaction was that the appointment of the Parish minister lay within the patronage of the local Heritors - in the case of Applecross that was Thomas MacKenzie, the last MacKenzie Laird. The vast majority of people in Shieldaig, Torridon, Applecross and Lochcarron left the established Church of Scotland for the Free Church. Thomas MacKenzie resolutely refused to allow any of his land to be used for the erection of a building of a Free Church. Dr. James Begg, one of the Founding Fathers of the Free Church, visited Shieldaig and Applecross in 1845. He describes the congregation in both places holding their services on the sea shore. He comments “these poor Highlanders must face all the storms of winter on the bare sea-beach, denied a single inch of land on which to erect a place of worship”. The Lochcarron congregation were slightly better off as they worshipped in an open field under canvas. In 1845 an interdict signed by the Moderator of the Free Church was read out in both Houses of Parliament protesting at Thomas MacKenzie’s refusal to grant sites for churches to be built. In 1847 MacKenzie was forced to stand down as a Member of Parliament, and in the 1851 census he and his wife and family of three sons and three daughters were residing in Edinburgh.

In time, Applecross, Shieldaig and Lochcarron seceders all built very substantial churches and manse. A site in Camusterrach was granted by Lord Middleton to the Free Church, and the buildings which are now the Church of Scotland church and manse, were built as Free Church properties. We have word of mouth reports that the women of the parish laboured with the men in the gathering of gravel and sand for its construction. However, not many years passed before further concerns arose in the Free Church. These concerns finally reached a climax in 1893 when Rev. Donald MacDonald of Shieldaig and Rev. MacFarlane of Raasay left the Free Church and formed the Free Presbyterian Church. Most people in Shieldaig left with their minister, and the Free Church and manse that had been built in the late 1870’s were largely redundant. As before, the new congregations worshipped in the open until new churches were built. In Applecross, the Free Presbyterians worshipped on the slope near where the present church is situated. Open air services for the Free Church were held to the east of the old school house. Open air services continued in some cases after the church buildings were available because at Communion times the congregations were too great to be accommodated inside the buildings.

At the present time, there are four good church buildings in Applecross, but falling numbers in all congregations - an ironic contrast to the early years of Rev. MacQueen when there was only one congregation, and only one ruinous church to accommodate all the people before the new Clachan Church was built.

(Catriona McCowan with thanks to the works of Ian MacKenzie & Iain MacLennan)

Dr Una MacLean

This short article features the life of Dr. Una MacLean as an indicator of the changing times the 20th century brought to the religious outlook in Applecross and the wider life of Scotland. Una MacLean

was born in Applecross as a daughter of the manse in 1925. Her father was the first Church of Scotland minister to live in the Camusterrach manse, which had been built as a Free Church manse. This left Clachan manse unoccupied. The last minister to occupy Clachan manse was the Rev. Laing. Una, like all children of that time and place, was subject to strict Sabbath observance – no outside play regardless of the season, no drawing, no singing of secular songs and of course attendance at morning and evening church services as well as family worship in the home. While for some children this type of upbringing installed a lifetime's reverence, for Una it had the opposite effect, and she became a lifelong atheist.

She was a highly intelligent girl and after completing her school education at Applecross Primary and Dingwall Academy she moved on to Edinburgh University where she studied medicine. She graduated in 1949 at the top of her class. After graduation she married Dr. Peter Cockshott. After living in Edinburgh for a time, they took up a posting in the British Protectorate of Aden in 1952. As the only woman doctor, she was allowed to treat the Muslim women in the harems of the wealthy merchants – a window into a very different world from that of her upbringing. After a brief return to Edinburgh they took up a new posting to Ibadan in Nigeria. Again, this was a new culture for Una to work in, but she displayed skills of communication and co-operation by being able to work closely with the witch doctors of the Yoruba. She was able to get them to send patients who were not being cured by the traditional methods of the witch doctors, to the western type medical hospitals that were being built. While in Africa she was also involved in a smallpox epidemic in 1957, blood transfusion work and cancer research. One wonders if the very traditional culture of Applecross that she had been raised in, and some of the ancient superstitions such as the “corp creagha” which she may well have heard of, helped in her ability to empathise with other cultural traditions.

For over twenty years Dr. Maclean taught in the Department of community Medicine in Edinburgh University. She was also the author of five books, one of which, “Magical Medicine” used her experiences in Africa. Her other books dealt with other aspects of medical care such as community care for the elderly, heart attacks and nursing care. She ended her career as the Acting head of her department and was made a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. Una died in Edinburgh in 2012 aged 87.)

The Wills Family's Clouds (not IT clouds!)

(The information for the following article was given by John Cameron, Dan McCowan & Michael Summers)

When Captain Arnold Wills bought Applecross Estate in 1929 he had a yacht built for him - the “Silver Cloud”. The family used it for pleasure trips around the west highlands. There was a crew of four – a skipper (Captain Frost), a deck hand, an engineer and a steward cum chef (Tom Gager & Mr. Chatterton at different times). The chefs came to Applecross gardens to get vegetables from John McCowan and the family got to know them. They were kind enough to send gifts to the children – Dan & Alistair - at Christmas times, one memorable present being a fretwork set. The Silver Cloud was sailed south each autumn and back to Applecross each summer.



During WWII the Silver Cloud was loaned to the navy for war work. After the war, she was returned to Inverness, to the Thornbush slipway, for repairs. She was used in Applecross for one season after the war, but was then sailed south and did not return.

The Wills also had a launch at this time – the “Passing Cloud” which was used for freight work. She carried goods to and from Kyle and she was also used to

transport animals – sheep and cattle. At that time, there was a family of two brothers and a sister still living on Rona and the estate regularly purchased animals from them. During the war, the time came, when the authorities decided that the family was no longer able to cope living on Rona. The Passing Cloud was dispatched by the Applecross Estate to take them to Kyleakin, to their new home. All the animals were also taken off the island and brought to market. It was mainly estate workers who crewed the Passing Cloud – George MacDonald, Murdo MacDonald (Murachadh Mor), Donnie Ferguson (Seiram), Alexander MacDonald (Ali Glas). While the Silver Cloud was being used for war service, the Passing Cloud was used by the family during the summer season. A kit was made to make the hold comfortable for them to travel in. Each winter it was removed and stored in the boat shed at Milton, and then refitted in the summer. Unfortunately, the boat went on fire in Portree harbour and was not repaired.

After that, the family had a boat, the “Dancing Cloud”. She was built on a fishing boat hull at St. Monans in Fife. She was then fitted out as a pleasure craft. She was not sailed down south over winter, but was anchored in the Pol Creagha. Murdo Finlayson (the Coileach) was employed to keep an eye on her over the winter months. He and Ruairaidh Cameron, when Ruairaidh was at home on leave, would take her out for short trips, perhaps just round St. Island, to keep the engine in good order. The Wills had intended to call the Dancing Cloud the Bouncing Cloud, but apparently, Ted Heath, the Prime Minister, already had a boat of that name.

Then there was the Thunder Cloud, a large, fast motor boat. She had been used during the war to check the sea for any debris before sea planes took off. The Wills bought her after the war ended. She was sunk in the Applecross waters by accident.

Later there was the Tiny Cloud, so named because she was a small yacht, built, not for pleasure cruises, but for scudding around inshore waters.

A 16 ft. clinker built dinghy was bought by Major John Wills at a boat show and named “MacCloud”. She was not suitable for using around here as she was too bulky. She was sold in 2006 by Alexander Wills, still in beautiful condition owing to her lack of use.

Alexander Wills at present has the latest cloud - the “Fairy Cloud”. She is an 18ft. Drascombe Lugger, a yawl rigger. She is kept in the boat shed at Milton when not in use.

EVENTS

We hope to enjoy a talk by Lord Mingunish, Chair of the Land Court, in the summer.

Cameron will be continuing with his very popular Historic Walks around Applecross, and we hope to arrange an Historic Walk in the Torridon area, led by our long-time supporter, Iain MacLennan, whose book "Old Torridon" has recently been reprinted.

MEMBERSHIP

Once again, I would like to remind readers to renew their membership fees for 2017. Please send cheques to either Ruairidh Cameron at 2, Camusterrach Place, Applecross, IV54 8LT or to Catriona McCowan at Tom na Creige, Culduie, Applecross, IV54 8LX. You can also pay directly to the bank. Our sort code is 80-08-84 and the account number is 00276354. If you do pay directly to the bank, please make sure that we know who has paid!

We hope many of our members as well as casual visitors will manage to visit us over the summer months and enjoy our displays.

I hope you enjoy hearing about our work and continue to support our efforts to preserve the history of Applecross and pass it on to others.