



APPLECROSS
HERITAGE CENTRE
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Applecross Historical Society

NEWSLETTER

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Issue 34

We re-opened for the 2019 season on April 5th, and we, and our visitors, have enjoyed a wonderful spell of beautiful Spring weather for our first few weeks of opening.

We have again been very fortunate in adding a new volunteer to our “resource pool”. Tony Jackson and his wife, Rosemarie, have bought the Schoolhouse and have become Applecross’ newest residents. Tony is keen to be involved, and has been roped in to help man the Heritage Centre. Although a far cry from their previous home in Oxford, Tony and Rosemarie are thoroughly enjoying the different way of life here.

War Research

Alan Gillies has completed his researches about Applecross’ involvement in WW I & II and has produced an excellent draft document which is ready for printing. We will use his book as the basis for our Display, along with additional photographs and artifacts. We hope the Bord na Gaidhlig grant which has been secured, will assist with the display work as well as the printing costs for the booklet. Unfortunately, the display has not been completed in time for our opening, but we hope this will soon be progressed.

Our sincere thanks to Annabel MacRae for preparing the following, most interesting article. I am sure you will enjoy reading about Dr. MacDonald, a most inspiring son of Applecross.

Emigration from Applecross - From Applecross to Africa

Dr Roderick MacDonald

It is not unusual for the inhabitants of the Highlands to be multi-skilled, able to turn a hand to anything, often out of necessity. However, few could match Roderick MacDonald who, as well as mastering medicine and divinity, turned his hand to architecture, carpentry and teaching.

Roderick was born in Milltown in 1899 to Murdo MacDonald, the skipper of the Estate launch and a skilled carpenter, and his wife Catherine Gillanders. He was one of a family of three, with two sisters Eliza and Katie, who lived in the first house nearest to Milltown Pier. After his education at the primary school in Applecross and secondary education at Dingwall Academy, Roderick attended Edinburgh University where he qualified as a doctor. Roderick was 18 when WW1 ended and, though a photograph of him in uniform exists, he did not see active service.

After obtaining his medical degree he undertook a course in tropical medicine in London



followed by ordination into the ministry of the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland. His mind was set on working on the Mission in Africa and on 12th October 1928 Dr. Roderick arrived in Ingwenya in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). His fiancée, Flora Matheson, followed him and soon they were married.

Dr. MacDonald's first report to the church synod described his arrival where he found "on hand a quantity of drugs and some dressings.....and a room to serve as a surgery". The building was made of corrugated iron and incredibly hot in the summer. Doctor immediately created a window to allow a flow of air, but it was difficult to spend any length of time in this room, especially for a young man from the Highlands. Accompanying this first report, Doctor MacDonald sent plans for a new hospital which he hoped would house 6 - 8 beds.

He immediately set about building the two-room hospital, one a dispensary and the other a ward. Later on, he added two round huts for additional patients. There was also a small kitchen and store for relatives of patients to use, the provision of food being their responsibility. This hospital was to be his base for the next 20 years.

Not only did Dr Roderick build the hospital, but also all the hospital furniture. Though untrained, he was a gifted carpenter and built medicine and instrument cupboards, an examination couch and a dental chair. Obviously not only an academic, but a jack of all trades.

“Doctor” as he was known to all, found his medical skills to be in high demand with patients suffering from yaws, malaria, dysentery, malnutrition, skin diseases, pneumonia and eye problems as well as the usual injuries. Also noted was the prevalence of venereal diseases caused by many men working away from home in towns and mines. One early issue was that women required their husband’s permission to become an in-patient in the hospital and, if the husband was away from home, they could not agree to treatment.



So, at first, patients were reluctant to become in-patients, but in time they came to see the benefits of a hospital stay. High infant mortality led Doctor Roderick to run classes for women on health care. A local girl, Mabel Radasi, was trained by him in first aid and nursing, working in the dispensary and visiting the sick in their homes. Clinics were also held at outstations and Doctor travelled to these on horseback in the early years and later when the roads were impassable during the rainy season. Classes on Hygiene and First Aid, taught by Doctor, were held in the

school. His wife Flora taught cookery and domestic science to the girls. Recipes were adapted to African ingredients and Dr Roderick thoroughly approved, writing “Direct medical intervention can avail little when the root cause of the trouble is lack of proper food”.

While on the family’s first furlough 1937 Dr Roderick raised money for a new well for the Mission through a series of talks about his work. On return he and Rev. Tallach set about constructing the new well which yielded 1000 litres of water a day, essential for an area which suffered from droughts as well as rainy seasons.



Doctor Roderick and his growing family (four boys) were badly in need of a better house than the two corrugated iron huts they had



lived in to date so Doctor designed and built a new house with a Dutch gable. A concrete floor with a metal-ant proof course under the brickwork was his solution to the dreaded ants which devoured anything made of wood. For this reason, he specified steel windows. He wanted a thatched roof, but had to make do with the ubiquitous corrugated iron.

On return to Ingwenya Doctor continued his medical and preaching duties, but also turned his attention to the school now with a school roll of 600 including 150 boarding pupils. Drawing up plans for a new school in the form of an H with six classrooms on either side with a common room and office running across linking the two wings, Doctor Roderick supervised the build until a builder from Glasgow took over. The school was very highly thought of with inspections regularly commending the standards achieved. Though it was a mission school, the importance of education for girls and boys was given equal status. In common with the times, subject matter was different with the girls making their brightly coloured print dresses while the boys undertook technical subjects and gardening. Families were more than happy to receive the fruits of their children's labours. The Doctor was also content that the staple maize meal and millet diet was supplemented by the vegetables which were grown at school.

In 1948 Dr Roderick MacDonald left Africa for the last time after 20 years' service as doctor, minister, teacher, architect, carpenter and designer. The family had a much deserved break in Scotland, including visiting Applecross, but before long Dr Roderick MacDonald and family were on the move again to Vancouver in Canada where he became a much loved pastor.

Sources:

A Heart for Africa by Dolina MacCuish

Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland Synod report 1929- Dr MacDonald's Report

Photographs- from the collection at Calum and Eliza Maclean's house, No1 Milltown

MEMBERSHIP FEES

Please remember that your membership fees should be renewed for this year. They remain at £10 for the year. Payment can be by cheque (made out to Applecross Historical Society), sent to Ruairidh Cameron, 2 Camusterrach Place, Applecross, IV54 8LW or Catriona McCowan, Tom na Creige, Culduie, Applecross IV54 8LX, or by direct payment to our bank account – account no. 00276354 Sort Code 80-08-84. If paying by the BACS method, please ensure that we know you have paid!