



Newsletter - November, 1999 Issue No. 1

APPLECROSS HERITAGE CENTRE :

BACKGROUND

It is now just over a year since the idea of establishing an Applecross Historical Society took shape.

No-one could have expected that the idea would take off with so much vigour and, for those who have now a consuming involvement, it is hard to imagine life without the monthly meetings. These are now attracting gratifying numbers to the mix of light-hearted reminiscence and solid endeavour and are already beginning to show results. Archives are building slowly with 121 items at the time of this Newsletter.

OBJECTIVES

The Constitution of the Society, drawn up at the first meeting, sets out the objectives of research, gathering, recording and publishing all aspects of Applecross history. There is provision for the holding of exhibitions, fairs or any other events promoting the interests of the Society. At the recent AGM, a resolution to make the organisation a company limited by guarantee was carried. This will enable the Society to apply for charitable status.

The exciting progress being made on the major project of a planned Heritage Centre is reported under its own heading and the discipline of gathering and collating information on the history of the peninsula proceeds apace.

PLACE NAMES

In recognition of the speed with which old place names are being lost as the older generation of native Gaelic speakers passes on and of the greater mobility that increases our familiarity with wider geographical areas while removing detailed knowledge, a start has been made on the collection of place names. This is being done both by research into historical records and in consultation with senior citizens. Allison Macleod has had an auspicious start, making up for unfamiliarity with Gaelic by painstaking and systematic recording.

However, those who are familiar with the idiosyncrasies of the names recorded in the various editions of Ordnance Survey maps or with some of the oddities recorded by Professor Watson in his 'Place Names of Ross-shire' will recognise that time, and anglicised pronunciation can obscure original meanings. With that in mind, we intend to consult with both our own experts, some of whom are already regular attenders at meetings, and with professionals.

SKILLS

One of the delights of the developing Society has been the recognition of the breadth of untapped historical skills available in the peninsula. This is not surprising. In the '30s Applecross boasted at least three Fellows of the Society of Antiquarians of Scotland. The best remembered of these is the late Kenneth MacRae of Camustiel who has left much well researched information behind.

CONTRIBUTORS

We are aware of an increasing number of talented people both here and furth of Applecross who have ties with, or interest in, the place and who have contacted us. At the risk of appearing invidious, I mention a few below.

One of our most valued contributors is Miss Ann Bishop from Manchester who has given us much interesting information about former owners of the Applecross Estate including the Duke of Leeds who bought from the Mackenzies and his successors, the Middletons. She has also gifted papers which, we hope, will form part of our display.

Miss Bishop's interest in Applecross began with a visit to Lonbain which so captured her imagination that she painstakingly reconstructed census records for Lonbain and Calakille which are now part of our archives. She continues to collect information and is a most valued friend of the Society.

Before the Society was formed, the late Captain Andrew Wills encouraged my own researches and kindly allowed access to some estate papers.

Dave Collins of Papakura, New Zealand, whose ancestors came from Applecross contacted me two years ago and, as a result of our exchanges, he has placed the Society on the mailing list of the Waipu 'Friends of the House of Memories'. In exchange, a copy of the paper on Applecross history, originally prepared by me for The Venture Trust, has been lodged in the Waipu museum.

Duncan Macdonald of British Columbia, son of the Rev. Dr. Roderick Macdonald, born in Milton and remembered by older Applecross people, has also been in touch, thanks to a random item in 'An Carrannach', and one result of a vigorous exchange of correspondence is that he is the first fully paid up member of the Applecross Historical Society! (See final section).

We continue to be indebted to Dr. Alexander Gillies for the steady stream of papers and photographs which he provides. In his excellent biography 'Gillies of Partick', his son Kenny assures us that his father had 'the foresight to keep a diary from childhood!' so we look forward to more, Alexander!. Young Kenny's book is available for sale in Applecross Post Office. As well as a moving testimony to the life of that remarkable son of Applecross the book gives, in its opening chapter, an interesting account of crofting in Applecross at the turn of this century.

As we examine the possibilities of the Internet both for research and, of greater immediacy, to advertise our activities and seek financial support, John McKeown, Salacher, has indicated his willingness to give us specialist advice. Donald Cameron has also volunteered the assistance of his sister, Grace! It is heartening that so much goodwill exists.

We have also had support from our own Gordon Cameron, currently working at Sabhal Mor Ostaig, whose contributions are marked by punctilious recording of provenance and are a

lesson to all of us! It is always easier to evaluate articles and extracts when their source, author and date of publication are known.

Mary and Murdoch Macdonald, Alligin and Evanton have a continuing interest in our progress. Murdoch's excellent book on 'Old Torridon' has done a great service to that special community.

Among those others whose interest has given impetus to our researches, Alan Gillies, son of Duncan John, has the happy knack of evaluating material thoroughly before acceptance and, however, vicariously, disciplining those of us who have a romantic vision of history.

Aidan MacDonald of Roinn Na Seandalaiochta at University College, Cork and formerly of the Inspectorate of Ancient Monuments has been in touch with Alistair McCowan and our contact with Bangor in Northern Ireland, parent monastery to Maelrubha's settlement here, continues via the Bangor Heritage Centre and the present Rector there.

HERITAGE CENTRE

The major project undertaken by the Society is the planned Heritage Centre. We have been concerned for some time that the 8th Century monastic settlement of Maelrubha and his successors from which the Celtic Church spread Christianity into Pictland has been so badly neglected. Thanks to the co-operation of Applecross Estate Trust, opportunity now exists to make good that neglect. There has been agreement that the conifers planted over the site of Maelrubha's monastery will be sympathetically removed and preliminary work has now started. Mr. John Wood, Senior Archaeologist with The Highland Council, and Historic Scotland officials are aware.

The Trust have offered a site at Clachan at an affordable rent and have generously indicated that assistance by way of clearing the area and otherwise will be provided. Full details are awaited but the Committee have drawn up a Funding Prospectus and identified possible sources of grants for the erection of a suitable building. Leader II have given their support in principle and a number of Charitable Trusts have been approached with a view to achieving financial support for the project.

The Heritage Centre will be linked to a new car park by a woodland route and will show the story of Christian development in Applecross.

It will also attempt to display both artefacts and written material on the crofting, fishing, school and estate life on the peninsula over the years. The results of our research into Place Names will be on show.

With the present interest in Early Settlers, it is hoped that Edinburgh University Department of Archaeology will be able to advise on, and contribute to, an appropriate display. In that connection, Dr. Caroline Wickham Jones of Edinburgh University Department of Field Archaeology gave a most interesting lecture in Applecross on Early Settlers and on their recent work excavating shell middens on Crowlin and in mainland Applecross which yield much valuable information about these early settlers, from approximately seven thousand years ago. The lecture was well attended and much appreciated.

COMMUNITY RESPONSE

Recipients of the Newsletter will readily recognise that success in our ambitious undertakings requires a good financial base. To that end, we should be happy to receive your membership fees of £5 in confirmation of your desire to support an important community project. In return, you will get a receipt from our Treasurer, Mrs. Catriona McCowan, our thanks and, in due course, further Newsletters.

Our thanks will be multiplied if you forward old articles, press cuttings and/or photographs relevant to the peninsula of former years. Don't worry if they are old, damaged or even incomplete. Do tell us what their origins are. We hope that those with contributions of any sort will contact any member of the Committee either informally or at one of the monthly meetings.

As the project develops, we shall also be looking for a range of old crofting and fishing items appropriate for display so do not throw out that old woodworm-riddled cas-chrom or flail before we have seen it!

The outlook for financing the structure is good. Running costs including the major element of staffing the centre will depend on our ability to raise funds for an ongoing exercise. Membership of the Society will help as will the sale of our booklet 'A Glimpse of History' and, in the fullness of time, admission charges. The booklet is selling well. Copies may be obtained from the Post Office, Flower Tunnel, Hotel or from Mrs. Janet Mackay (tel. 744226) (Cost £2)

The project is bigger than the Committee and needs the support and enthusiasm of the whole community as well as that of our committed friends elsewhere.

I recently visited the Arisaig Land, Sea and Islands Centre which opened this summer. This is similar to what we envisage for Clachan. It even shares Maelrubha with us for he set up a cell there. What was more impressive than the well structured displays and the wonderful building was the tangible community enthusiasm for what had been achieved and the pride of the local people in their heritage. Applecross needs similarly to show our pride in the unique aspects of our peninsula, and the Historical Society has every confidence that this can be done and done well. We hope we can share this confidence with you.

MEMBERSHIP OF APPLECROSS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Membership of the Applecross Historical Society is £5.00 per year. To join, please send a cheque to Catriona McCowan, Keppoch, Applecross, Strathcarron, Wester Ross, IV54 8ND.