



APPLECROSS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Comunn Eachdraidh na Comraich

Web : www.applecrossheritage.org.uk

NEWSLETTER - JUNE, 2004 Issue No. 10

APPLECROSS HERITAGE CENTRE:

Early indications are that our second full season of trading will be as successful as the first. The number of visitors looks promising and Captain Ruairidh Cameron has taken over the post of Treasurer of the Society in addition to helping with attendance at the Centre. We have also been fortunate in the assistance offered by Fena Scott and Susan Grocock and in expressing our thanks to all who give of their time at the Centre, we trust that they will find their duties as rewarding as we have!

As this Newsletter goes to press, Phase II of the development is about to start. The Army will work for a fortnight, laying a concrete floor, tidying up the stone walls, creating a car park and developing the access path.

Sandra MacDonald and her sister Nana Chisholm have presented the Society with an oak seat in memory of their parents. This is particularly appropriate as their father, Kenneth MacRae FSA, did so much in his lifetime to share his enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, Applecross history. By happy coincidence, and thanks to the persistence of Mrs Mona Smith, we are in touch with Dr Caldwell of the Department of History and Applied Art in the Royal Museum of Scotland who has undertaken to produce for our inspection the Brooch found in Applecross and gifted to the Museum by Mr MacRae in 1934. In due course we hope to be able to display at least a photograph and, if we satisfy the Museum that we can provide the necessary security, we may be able to negotiate a loan of this ancient item.

Wester Ross Alliance have supported the successful paths walks conducted by Lesley KilBride and Gill Fairweather. These are now based on the Centre and donations go towards the Heritage Centre/Historical Society. The walks take place every fortnight and are highly recommended.

Ann Bishop visited Applecross at the end of April and is continuing to be a wonderful, and reliable, source of information. She has been particularly helpful with the Middleton files held at the University of Nottingham. Ann shows remarkable tenacity in following up items of interest. Although she completed the mammoth task of copying census details for Applecross some years ago, she recently advised us that she had traced to the Mormon International Genealogy Index an item which she had thought to be incomplete in the census records. She is in touch with Bobbie Amyes from New Zealand, granddaughter of John Macleay who was born in Applecross in 1855. Bobbie has worked on the Scotland Free Census Project as reported in the December Newsletter. We reproduce here another example of Ann's versatility.

The poem was written after Ann's first visit in September 1991 when she travelled through Wester Ross and the Isle of Skye. The reference to 'biting things' gives a clue to her absence from Applecross when the family Ceratopogonidae, midges to you, make their annual appearance

A HIGHLAND HOLIDAY

Tranquil lochs delight the eye
Jagged peaks serrate the sky
Sunsets turn the hills to gold
Where eagles fly – or so I'm told.

Purple heather o'er the moor
Footprints on a lonely shore
Seals on rocks, birds airing wings
Sheep and deer, and biting things!

Misty mountains wet with rain
Feed waterfalls and streams again
Images as strong as these
Form deep and lasting memories
Highland days where spirits soar
Locked in my thoughts for evermore.

Ann Bishop 1991.

GENEALOGY:

From time to time we receive requests from all corners of the globe to provide information on ancestors. In many cases the lack of specific information and also the limitations of the census details that we hold make it difficult to comply. Where we are unable to give specific assistance, it is our custom to advise on other sources of information. These include Inverness Library where the resident Genealogist, Alistair Macleod, and his staff provide an excellent service. A number of developments have provided us with additional sources for research.

These include a CD on Applecross Family History prepared by the industrious Iain MacLennan, Shieldaig. He has used census records and the International Genealogical Index to identify parish family groupings, including maiden names where possible. Murdoch MacDonald has created his Torridon Genealogy and the CD covers a period from 1750 to 1900. There are details of village and clan distributions, photographs and extracts from historical documents. Both have great value and we are grateful to the authors. In addition, Donald Cameron arranged for the Applecross Old Parish Registers to be copied by Inverness Library. Unfortunately, the quality of the copies received by us, together with the vagaries of the handwriting of the Ministers make details difficult to decipher. It is understood that there are plans to put OPR on CD at some stage.

FEEDBACK:

The most rewarding part of involvement with the Centre continues to be the, often unexpected, feedback from visitors. For example, when we mentioned the visitor from Western Australia in the last Newsletter, we did not expect that a casual comment made by Bert Brown would be remembered by the time that he returned to Australia from a world trip but in December we were advised that he had returned safely and placed an order in Melville for a copy of the book 'Melville From Bushlands to Metropolis' to be sent to the Society. In further correspondence, it transpired that Bert has Fraser ancestors and we have been able to point him in the right direction for his researches to his great delight.

Another visitor, from Stevenage, mentioned his inability to get a copy of Sorley Maclean's poems in a well-known Edinburgh bookshop so we lent him a well-thumbed paperback Reothairt is Contraigh. We were not surprised as months passed without contact. What did surprise and impress was that, in February, the book came home with a manuscript copy of Seamus Heaney's translation of Hallaig and we remembered that we had expressed the view that Maclean's own translation, as in the book, was the best. In the literal sense this is true but Heaney has translated using his own poetic licence and, in thanking us for our trust, our English friend has also gently corrected us! Those who listened to the 7th June report on Radio nan Gaidheal of Heaney's recent visit to Hallaig would have heard Angus Peter Campbell making the same point, we think, if he had not been brushed aside by the urgency of the 9 o'clock news! Surely the ultimate comment on the modernisation of the Gael!

RADIO PROGRAMME:

In January, the Society was contacted by Matt Dyas who researches for *Open Country* on Radio 4. He was given assistance in identifying likely participants and briefed on the history of the area. The finished product was broadcast in March and the Society has a transcript. Congratulations to all the articulate people who participated. Many friends who do not know Applecross commented on the lines of 'It sounded like a marvellous place to live in'. Of course, we all know that!

PLACE NAMES:

The exercise in collecting these continues. It was a pleasure to see Duncan Murchison at a recent meeting. He brings not only a wide knowledge of names now under threat but also a sound and extensive vocabulary in his native language.

Mary MacDonald, who continues to provide relevant information, has been involved in the University of St Andrews exercise on place names in the Beaulieu area and draws our attention to the St Andrews' website which has lots of information on this impressive exercise under Beaulieu, The Aird and Strathglass. She has also provided a copy of the report, *Recent Thinking on New Native Woodland Planting in Upland Scotland* which is interesting and contentious. We are grateful to Mary and to Alan Gillies, Culduie, for their continued and constructive help.

PHOTOGRAPHS:

We welcome photographs to add to our collection. Notable in recent months has been one donated by Marie Packer, which shows her son, Jago, as an infant with the late Mrs Marion MacBeath, Grace Ann's mother-in-law. As Marie says, it is a nice photograph of age and youth. Mrs MacBeath was 93 when the picture was taken and lived to the grand age of 102.

HAROLD BROWN, NEW YORK :

In the December Newsletter we mentioned Harold's visit and his moving email sent after the visit. It is worthy of a wider audience so permission was sought to reproduce it here. In the whimsical style already in evidence as he mastered English in Applecross Public School, he replied as follows:

"To the best of my recollection, I did not mention anything about my recent and rather lurid affair with Kim Bassenger or that many of Bush's decisions are the result of my counsel, which he frequently solicits. That being the case, please feel free to do what you want with my letter."

We want you to see the full content, so make no apology for the length!

"Dear Ian,

A thousand apologies for the inexcusable delay in my responding to your wonderful letter. As I may have told you when we met, I travelled on to California after returning to New York and it took a while to get to me. My son-in-law has been travelling and I have been serving as a septuagenarian, wrong sex nanny for my granddaughters. My daughter does not permit me much time for frivolities such as letter writing.

First, I must tell you that I was in an absolute fog when we chatted. Unexpectedly, I had been overwhelmed by emotion on seeing Applecross again. Wolfe's oft quoted line that, 'You can't go home again,' had been proven untrue. Of course I had promised myself that if I ever saw Vienna again, it would be through a bombsight. The part of New York City where we lived

when I first rejoined my parents, before they established themselves, turned into an arson demolished slum/no man's land, with nothing left to revisit. When Karen and I returned to southern Spain, where we met and married when I was flying with the Navy, the area had remorphed into an unrecognisable modern European setting. Almost nothing was left to remind us of how it had been, with the possible exception of the old aeroplanes that the Navy was still flying.

My time in Scotland was a distant memory, brought up mainly when I happened to meet a Scot or had occasion to review the story of my life with someone. I suppose that it never occurred to me that either the people or the place could be as I remembered after all those years. Actually, we had been planning a trip to Peru and then on to Bolivia, to visit a town where Karen had lived as a child. It turned out that Karen should not (for medical reasons) go to the altitudes that would be required to transit from Peru to Bolivia and we had to re-plan. She decided that, since we could not revisit the scene of her childhood, why could we not go to Scotland to see the place where I had lived. I became excited at the thought and we did just that.

As soon as we reached the highlands, memories started flooding back. The look of the hills, the heather, the sheep and even the colors of the light were instantly familiar. Computers have come a long way, but they have much further to go to begin to manage the feats of memory and recollection that the human brain does at our bidding.

Having our hostess in Skye call for us, and her placing us with the Gillies', was, of course, serendipity. Already charmed by his wife, it was amazing to meet Angus and to learn that he had been at School when Felix and I were there and remembered us. When he told us that the manse and the church and the school were still there, it began to seem like a dream.

I should digress for a moment and make clear that my personal specific recollections of Applecross are limited to the MacLeods. While, of course, I remember being in school and playing and all of that, I do not remember your faces and, of all the names, only yours rang a bell. Perhaps you may have been a few years older than I. While this is insignificant now, it could have made a big difference as to how much is remembered. Otherwise, to the extent that you have stayed in touch with your childhood friends, such memories can be preserved and enhanced.

What I do remember very well is that the unfailing kindness of everyone there, young and old, made what might have otherwise been a miserable and lonely year into a cherished memory. Certainly the MacLeods taking us in saved our lives directly. By giving them the flexibility that allowed them eventually to leave Vienna as well, it also saved my parents' lives. This is in our oral family history. My daughter knows all about it as do my nephews and niece, and it will be passed on to the next generation.

Mishaps make for specific memory and I remember three instances. We were at some boyscout activity and there was a small clubhouse. My finger was in the door jamb and got caught when someone tried to close the door. I had not yet learned English and, while I yelled at the top of my lungs in German, nobody put it together with whatever it was that was keeping the door from closing. Another time, possibly also with the boyscouts, we were camping outdoors. I had developed a huge boil under my arm and had to be taken home, to my chagrin. The third had to do with a bump that grew in a very private place and turned out to be a tic that had to be removed with a glowing cigarette and a lot of embarrassment. Forgive me for blathering on, but these are the things that come to mind.

Even as I write this, other memories come surging back. I will come back and we will talk over a pint. Otherwise, this letter will turn into a volume.

It was incredible to see the school, somewhat enlarged but much the same. More incredible still was that the headmistress recognized my name and knew our story. Then, the Scotts being kind

enough to show us round the manse and the church was wonderful. The layout of the manse was familiar, although I remember a kitchen far different from the modern one there now. I knew where the woodshed was and recognized the chicken coop where I had strewn food and collected eggs. Sonas, our dog, would swipe eggs and carry them to the front door to break with his paw and eat. When Rev. Scott suggested that he believed that the trees had been added since I had been there, I remembered that the front had been a relatively open field and that there had been hives.

I could go on and on but will not. What I had no memory of, all children being insensitive swine, is the stunning and breathtaking beauty of the area. My travels around the world have taken me to some scenic wonders, but nothing compares with Wester Ross. It is possible, but not necessary, to swing one's head around and see a new and serene vista in each direction. More amazingly, one may sit still and look out over the water (e.g., the Gillies' window) and watch as the changing light creates new scenes minute by minute.

We have all lived a big chunk of our lives by now and knocked around and taken our hits. When we get back together, I want to hear your stories. I think it is wonderful that I do not know which of you lived there right along and which have returned. Nor do I know whether you have all remained close over the years or have more recently come to know one another again. In any case, to be so close to one's childhood chums at our age is great and very rare these days and was a pleasure to see.

Thank you for the information you sent, I will write *everyone* within the next several days. My fondest regards to all.

Hal."

FORTHCOMING ATTRACTIONS:

Dr Isobel Henderson, one of the world's leading authorities on the Picts and their culture, will address the Society on Friday, 20th August. We look forward to her visit, not least because she is well aware of the importance of the Applecross monastic settlement. The impressive book *The Art of the Picts* written by Dr Henderson and her husband Professor George Henderson is now available and hailed as 'arguably the most important publication on this subject for over a century'

Our friend and adviser Aidan MacDonald, formerly Senior Lecturer at University College, Cork and a regular visitor to Applecross, will address us on The Lay Abbots on Friday, 8th October. His papers on the subject are in our archives.

Murdoch MacDonald has undertaken to lead us on one of the shorter Torridon walks on a date to be agreed soon. Look out for the notices for what will be an interesting evening with an expert on his home ground.

FINALLY:

Thank you all for your support .