



APPLECROSS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Comunn Eachdraidh na Comraich

Web : www.applecrossheritage.org.uk

NEWSLETTER - JULY, 2005 Issue No. 12

APPLECROSS HERITAGE CENTRE

GENERAL :

This year it was decided that we would open for Easter weekend and close again until the May Bank Holiday. Into our third full season of trading, the figures remain buoyant and again the mix of idyllic and diabolical weather has ensured that attendance figures look good. They are up slightly on last year as this goes to press.

Visitors now use the new car park and the access road from it. We are again indebted to our volunteer attendants. Regulars are Janet MacKay, Ruairidh Cameron and Alistair McCowan. We are particularly beholden to Susan Grocock who rushes to make herself available as soon as the family arrives in Applecross. Fena Scott has enjoyed doing some stints and tells me that she is again available as a stand-in now that David's work as Interim Moderator in Presbytery vacancies is meantime completed. Margaret McCowan, having given sterling service, has stepped down to be replaced by another member of the clan, Dan. Margaret's support continues in other areas, notably in the production of high quality paperwork including the finalisation of Newsletters. We are grateful. At the time of writing, Dan, who predictably enjoyed the work at the Centre and is a natural for the job, is unwell, and we look forward to his speedy recovery. Our sincere thanks to all. There is no doubt that the quality of our service is improved by the presence of enthusiastic and knowledgeable attendants.

The bulbs provided by Applecross Trust have made a brave show and thanks are due to Alistair and to Mike Summers for their work. The Trust has offered to provide further bulbs and some bushes and climbing roses for next year; also some mechanical help with the bulb trenches. We record our gratitude for the continued support of the Trust.

This year, in March, Ruairidh Cameron represented us for two days at the Strathpeffer Fair. This is an opportunity to advertise our own activities and we are grateful to him. The fair was well attended.

We were pleased to receive, from Murdo Angus Sutherland, a useful and thoughtfully prepared *Tourists' Guide to Applecross*. He has generously stated that funds from the sale of the paper, which is brisk, should go to the Society. We thank him for that and for taking the time to do the work involved.

While mentioning those who have done so much to help with the smooth running of the Centre, it would be remiss if the name of John McKeown was not underlined. John goes quietly about his work, copes with many queries and requests for membership. He keeps the website and computer up to date. We do see the difference, John, and value your guidance. Thanks to you and Elsie for your continued enthusiasm.

FISHING :

The Society is progressing papers on Applecross fishing. These have been submitted by Donald Cameron and others. The project is developing well.

PLACE NAMES :

As we progress the project on place names in Applecross, Alistair has received from Peter Muir in Achiltibuie a splendidly constructed CD, compiled by the Muir/Fraser family, of place names in Coigach with maps, photographs and music. The detail is based on work done by the Frasers, uncle and nephew. It is refreshing to read that Donnie Fraser who first set about collecting the place names was willing to disagree with the learned Professor Watson (Place-Names of Ross & Cromarty, 1904) where he thought it appropriate! The work is a wonderful example of the sort of user-friendly material to which we should be aspiring.

PHASE II :

As reported in the last issue, the first steps have been taken in developing the Centre. It has been agreed that we create the reading room discussed, and Alistair McCowan has secured funds with 45% of the cost being met by Leader Plus and the prospect of a further grant of 40% from Ross & Cromarty Enterprise. This leaves the balance to be met by us. Building is planned to commence when we close for the season.

In addition to the structural developments, we need to plan the internal layout, identifying and preparing documents for access and display. While the proximity to the attendant's desk of the only planned door into the extension makes for good security, we need to design a retrieval system for documents that is simple, tidy and understandable while minimising work for the attendant. Much of the documentation that will be made available to visitors is unique and some is held from various academic sources on the understanding that it is for study purposes only. We look forward to a busy winter!

BROOCH :

Negotiations for the loan of the brooch donated to the National Museum by Kenneth MacRae FSA in 1934, mentioned in the last issue, have now been completed. It was delivered to the Heritage Centre by Dr. David Caldwell, Head of History and Applied Art, on Thursday 30th June. On that evening he lectured on 'Recent Research on the Lordship of the Isles'. This subject is of particular interest to Applecross, as the power of the MacKenzies developed while that of the MacDonald Lords of the Isles declined.

Meantime, Alistair McCowan provided plans for a secure display case to meet the standards required by the museum. In view of the interest already generated in the photograph of the brooch, currently on display with an explanatory note, we have no doubt that the item will be a valuable addition to the Centre. The loan is for an initial period of three years and we are grateful for the assistance of Dr. Caldwell and Rosalyn Clancy, the Loans Officer.

ANN BISHOP :

On her regular spring visit to Applecross, Ann brought an extract from the 1901 census records covering Lonbain and Calakille. Margaret McCowan has typed the details, which will be made available on computer in due course. The 1901 records have recently been released. We continue to be grateful to Ann, the only life member of the Society, for her meticulous research and continued support.

VISITORS AND CONTACTS :

It is always a delight to welcome former staff and clients of the successive West Highland School of Adventure, Fairbridge Drake, Fairbridge and Venture Trust undertakings at Hartfield Lodge. Last year Ruairidh Cameron had a visit at the Centre from Brian Kerslake, now living in Cumbria, who had spent two summers employed by WHSA as a temporary instructor, one in 1967 and the other in 1972. He wrote to Alistair: 'What a delight it was to discover, (by chance!), and then visit the new Applecross Heritage Centre. It was such a pleasant surprise after a drive round the northern peninsula in driving rain and low cloud. My hearty congratulations to you and the society for all the years of hard work and vision to see the project through. The centre was very impressive and a very creative use of an old structure. It would've been a great pity if the Applecross story had been lost to the present and future generations'.

Brian mentioned that on his second visit he combined instructing with the completion of an undergraduate geography paper entitled 'An analysis of rural de-population in the Applecross parish of Wester Ross', a study he describes as a labour of love. He is modest about his work but notes that several people whom he interviewed passed on numerous documents. He does not remember who gave what but comments, 'I've merely been the custodian of these documents and would be delighted to hand them over to the society's archives, their rightful home'.

True to his promises, Brian has sent us not only the documents mentioned above but also other material from his original study and a brand new 2004 edition of the report in typescript together with a CD. These will have an honoured place in the reading room in due course.

Among the 'miscellaneous documents' included in his original file is a letter dated 1959 from a man in Kerrysdale, Gairloch, to Donald Finlayson (Saighdear) in Callakille expressing the sender's pleasure that Donald had found his dinghy on the shore. One can only speculate on the combination of wind and tide that seems to have carried the boat a distance of some twenty miles. Characteristic of the spirit of the isolated community of those pre-road days is the offer by the Kerrysdale man that when he comes to collect his boat, 'Should you wish me to bring you feeding stuff for your sheep or cattle or for yourselves, I could bring that to you and save you carriage.'

Dave Collins from New Zealand, with whom we were in touch some years ago, has again contacted us and provided much interesting information. His ancestors were Applecross people, some famously involved with the migrations organised by the Rev. Norman MacLeod. We have exchanged views on the clearances and Sabbath observance. Dave makes the interesting point that his Scottish ancestors were very literate, even when they had been farm labourers, while those who came from areas of England were unable to write. Readers will remember that Dave was the first to encourage our link with the Waipu House of Memories, a connection that is active still.

Our old friend, Michael MacDermott from Minnesota, USA, has kept us informed of developments. He prides himself on his Applecross ancestry and harbours a not-so-secret ambition to drive his prize cattle over the Bealach nam Bo some day. He has recovered from the indignity of having his Newsletter treated as 'spam' when he first asked for it to be sent by email, a service provided by John McKeown, and writes to tell us that he has moved house so that his wife may be closer to university where she is undertaking a PhD in Nursing Studies. This has meant that he has had to reduce his stock significantly. He gives a sensitive insight into the Redlake shootings in which a youth shot ten people in the local school of a native community in Minnesota. He notes the delicate problems still being created in the care of 'peoples whose culture and way of life was interrupted in the process of developing America'.

Andy Sanson, who, some years ago, wrote an article in the *Scots Magazine* about the Bealach and Applecross, has been in touch with John McKeown and joined our membership. He has fond memories of the place and wanted to trace Bernie Fish, a service on which we were happy to assist. He is looking forward to visiting the peninsula again in two years' time and introducing his wife to the delights of the Bealach by motorcycle.

Patrick Tagert has contacted John McKeown from California. He 'carries the surname of the original Earls of Ross of the Mac an t-sagairt line, the hereditary abbots of the monastery' and is the administrator for the Taggart surname DNA project. He is complimentary about our website and has asked for our view on linking his website to ours.

Dr Kurt C. Duwe's activities in connection with the Gaelic-speaking communities of Applecross, Lochcarron and Lochalsh were mentioned in our last Newsletter. We gave our comments at the time and were advised in February that twenty-one reports are now on website http://www.linguae-celticae.org/GLS_english.htm. Dr Duwe tells us that a second edition of the older volumes will be ready in autumn 2005. All completed reports may now be downloaded for study purposes. Volume 10 covers the local details.

Paul Bennett has been in touch and we have exchanged views on place names on the north coast of Applecross. He was particularly interested in a cave near Fearnmore and, thanks to Roddy (Fisher)

MacBeath's work on names in the area, we were able to advise him. Paul reminded me that I had given him a lift over the Bealach many years ago and described himself as 'a long-haired fella, in pony-tail, from Yorkshire, going to Ard Bain'. Like Andy Sanson, he looks forward to a return to the peninsula.

Finally for this section, which could become lengthy and repetitive, lengthy because there are many who come to John McKeown for information, and repetitive as several have the same themes of nostalgia and interest, we have been contacted by Craig S. Whyte who tells us that he worked formerly for the Nature Trust in Oban. He is now doing some research in connection with emigration from the West Highlands to Australia. Passenger lists of the Highlands and Islands and Emigration Society in the 1850s are available on the web, but Craig's study extends beyond these.

He is working in co-operation with historian Eric Richards who is preparing a new book on Highland emigration and interested in seeing copies of correspondence between Australian immigrants and their relatives or friends in their communities of origin. We should be pleased to hear from members who may have something to contribute on this interesting project.

VISIT OF *TIME TEAM* :

We have long known that the area round the campsite, once known as Borrowdale, with its Norse implications, is rich in traces of ancient structures. On record in the Old Statistical Account of 1792 is the comment by the Applecross contributor, the Rev. John MacQueen, that 'From the Danish are derived all these names which have 'burgh' in their the compound, as 'Burghdale'. It is observable that in all places of this designation there hath anciently been a Danish Dun...'. Folklore has the stone from such a castle or fort being removed to build the model farm of the early 19th Century in the time-honoured habit of recycling. Evidence of an earlier Broch, long suspected, was confirmed by John Wood, then Senior Archaeologist with Highland Council, when the Society held its study days in October 2000. Further items of interest in the area include a possible stone circle and aligned stones, suggestive of midsummer or midwinter solstices. No-one, of the slightest imagination, can stand on the eminence behind the Home Farm and picture the area free of its present woodland without realising that it was a perfect site for a safe settlement in those days when any threat of attack came primarily from the sea.

The Goldthorpe family used their initiative and, encouraged by Cathy Dagg, archaeologist, invited the well-known *Time Team* to visit. For three days at the beginning of June the team worked through the most miserable weather with great enthusiasm and professionalism. Noel Fojut of Historic Scotland, John Wood, now working busily on his own account and Cathy Dagg, assisted them. The Society Directors had opportunity to brief the team, and representatives were available for consultation throughout the exercise.

Oliver Twinch, Assistant Producer, writes to us saying, 'Despite the wet weather we had a fantastic excavation with great results.....By the end of day three we had internal and external walls, intra mural galleries, an entrance to an intra mural staircase and the beginnings of the staircase, a floor surface with Iron Age pottery in a secure context and then all the associated features, including an Iron Age metal working hearth'. He notes that much more is probably yet to be found at the campsite.

Much material was uncovered and removed for evaluation, after which the complete archive will be passed to the Treasure Trove panel of the National Museums of Scotland with which we are registering our interest. We look forward to the broadcast of the programme between January and March next year.

It was good to have an opportunity for discussion with both Noel Fojut and John Wood who have been greatly helpful to the Society since its inception. As reported in an earlier edition of the Newsletter, they have supported mini digs in the area outlined by Professor Thomas as that of the monastic vallum but consider that any attempt to drag out the roots of the conifers removed in 1999 could risk damaging valuable material. The suggestion is that this should not be undertaken for at least ten more years and then it is important that no new planting should be carried out in the area of the settlement. Both are of the opinion that there is still much archaeological work to be done in Applecross.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES :

Your directors arranged the undernoted programme :

| | | |
|------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Thursday 30th June | Dr David Caldwell | Lords of the Isles |
| Wed to Fri 10th to 12th Aug. | MacKenzie Gathering visit to Applecross | |
| Friday 12th August | Ian MacKenzie | A Glimpse of History |
| September | Ian Fisher (formerly of RCAHMS) | |
| Saturday 8th October | Historical walk in Torridon with | Murdoch MacDonald. |
| Friday 14th October | Rev. K. D. MacDonald | The Fernaig Manuscript |

Please note that the date of 14th October is not confirmed at this time.

The visit of the Clan MacKenzie was intimated in the last Newsletter and contact has since been made with Dr Ian Blake, President of the Clan MacKenzie Society who has visited the Centre and met Alistair McCowan. He suggests no lectures, even mini ones and only asks that we are available to answer questions. We are privileged to have been able to call on Rev. K. D. MacDonald, Ard Dhubh, formerly Senior Lecturer in Celtic at Glasgow University who is juggling his holiday arrangements to be with us for this event and also to give the Fernaig Manuscript lecture.

We are also delighted that Ian Fisher reacted well to being waylaid by one of our Directors as they attended a lecture in the National Library recently.

FINALLY :

The Newsletter notes with sadness, the passing of Grace Ann MacBeath, Toscaig. Grace Ann, widow of Duncan MacBeath, DCM, graciously agreed to be interviewed by Alison Macleod at the start of our place names project, giving valuable information about both Toscaig and Ard Dhubh, the village of her birth. More recently she allowed us to record her reminiscences about the community of her youth. With her, we have lost one of our links with early Applecross. Her enthusiasm for our heritage is continued by her nephews Ruairidh and Donald and her grandnephew Gordon in their support for our work.

Ian MacKenzie
July, 2005