



APPLECROSS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Comunn Eachdraidh na Comraich

Web : www.applecrossheritage.org.uk

NEWSLETTER JANUARY, 2006 Issue No.13

APPLECROSS HERITAGE CENTRE :

GENERAL :

Our third full year of trading ended in October with visitor numbers slightly down on last year but still highly satisfactory. However we are not complacent, realising that the visit of the MacKenzies, a spin-off from the Clan Gathering at Strathpeffer, mentioned in the last two issues of the Newsletter and reported fully below, helped to keep numbers buoyant. Also, examination of the figures shows that while visitors fell by an insignificant amount of 1.78% from last year's figures, our overall takings were down by 7.86%. It follows that the amount taken in sales and donations leaves room for improvement.

As always, we are indebted to volunteer attendants. Janet MacKay, Susan Grocock, Fena Scott, Ruairidh Cameron and Alistair McCowan have done sterling work. It is possible that we shall have some assistance next season from Elodie Chopin, a friend of the Jolys of Culduie, who is completing a degree course. The directors have warmly welcomed the offer.

Applecross Trust continue to be supportive and we are grateful for their financing of a quantity of plants. We also support their initiative in seeking to restore the Clachan Church now in their ownership.

PLACE NAMES :

Catriona McCowan is progressing the project by referring some of the material in A4 sections for comment by selected members. We now have a representative member on the Scottish Place-Name Society.

Mary MacDonald has kindly given us details of the professional work done on 'Beaully the Aird and Strathglass' in which she has been involved. The project was undertaken by the University of St Andrews and full details are on a website under the heading of the title.

PHASE II :

A planning application has been lodged for the construction of the Reading Room, and the work is currently out to tender.

BROOCH :

Following the report in our last Newsletter, the brooch donated to the National Museum by the late Kenneth MacRae FSA was finally installed in our display case by Alex Quinn of the museum on 20th July. As anticipated, it has attracted comment and it is a pity that Mrs Mona Smith of Edinburgh (one of the 'Manse girls' of our youth), who pursued the existence of the brooch with the museum and suggested that we attempt to arrange a loan, is now in failing health and unable to see the brooch in place.

VISITORS :

A major feature of our year was the visit of those Clan MacKenzie members who attended the Clan Gathering and took the opportunity to come to Applecross on one of the bus trips organised

by the Gathering officials. The following report is substantially what was prepared for 'An Carrannach' and appeared in its September issue.

MacKenzies Come to Applecross

As anticipated under the item 'Coming Events' in Newsletter No 11, the Clan MacKenzie Gathering at Strathpeffer included in its excursions three bus trips to Applecross on Wednesday to Friday 10th to 12th August. These were well supported and attendants turned out in strength to show the visitors a selection of papers, relevant to the MacKenzies' almost three hundred years of ownership of the sanctuary, that had been added to the display for the occasion.

The three days were rewarding to both attendants and visitors. An arrangement that allowed half of the visitors to lunch at Applecross Inn while the other half spent time in the Heritage Centre meant that the ratio of attendants to visitors was high and, for those who still had questions to address, query sheets were made available, together with written guidance on genealogical research. The weather was, in the main, idyllic and visitors were able to go round the graveyard to see the MacAogan Stone, the MacKenzie Mausoleum and the reputed site of Maelrubha's resting place.

In attendance were Alistair McCowan, Ruairidh Cameron, Janet MacKay, Fena Scott, Margaret Beaton, with her papers on the MacKenzies of Portmahomack and New Zealand, Ian MacKenzie and, to our great delight, Alan, Barbara and Toby Duncan Gillies who had made a special journey from Linlithgow. Alan had written a well-researched paper on the MacKenzies of Applecross and, when bound with a cover depicting the coat-of-arms of the MacKenzies of Applecross, this made a handsome booklet, which found a ready demand from the MacKenzies. We record thanks to Nick Goldthorpe who improved our computer print of the coat-of-arms at the last minute with some judicious enhancement.

As anticipated, most of the visitors came with their genealogy well researched and, in a group where more than two thirds came from overseas, they reminded us again of the pride in their ancestry displayed by 'exiles', some of whom who were seeing the country of their fathers for the first time. The oldest MacKenzie was a sprightly ninety-five years' young and the youngest a three-year old who was not overawed by the mass of MacKenzies surrounding her.

The Heritage Centre has made many new friends and collected a number of query sheets for eventual research and response. It also looks forward to adding to its membership. Ian MacKenzie's talk, 'A Glimpse of History', on the evening of Friday 12th was well attended and was a fitting conclusion to the MacKenzie event.

After the above report appeared, the work of responding to queries generated by the query sheets mentioned went on. One of these is still outstanding and concerns coats-of-arms. It was simply, 'We know that the MacKenzies of Applecross had their coat-of-arms. Did the MacKenzies of Gairloch have any?' The local contact we made has failed and before we take the matter further, is there any recipient of the Newsletter who knows the answer? Another request that gave us some exercise was, 'Anything about Maelrubha, please!' It transpires that the lady concerned is a vicar in Edgware and it is appropriate that we should be providing her with material for a sermon. Sheena Latta wanted some information about Captain Kenneth MacDonald, Toscaig and we were able to oblige, providing photographs of the house courtesy of the present owners.

There is no doubt that we made a number of new friends during this exercise and we are grateful to Gathering Secretary Phillipa MacKenzie for her willing help.

OTHER VISITORS AND CONTACTS :

We welcomed John and Patricia Kerr in June and accepted her long-standing offer to look at our processes. Mrs Kerr has considerable experience in this field and has made her findings available for our examination in due course. We are grateful to the Kerrs for their continued interest.

In July friends of Sandra and David MacDonald brought us some copies of 'Ye his Saints' by the late Allan Haldane, for resale. We already had on display a reference copy supplied by the MacDonalds last year.

Iain MacLennan is a regular visitor and has been of great assistance from the time of his first contact. He tells us that he may consider revising his CD on genealogy in the light of new information becoming available. He is still in touch with Bobbie Amyes and her husband who also visited us.

Once again we welcomed our good friend, The Venerable Dr Robert MacRae whose ancestor, Evander MacRae, left Lonbain and sailed, probably on the 'Polly', to Prince Edward Island in 1803. The 'Polly' left Skye as part of the Earl of Selkirk's emigration scheme. Dr MacRae has a passion for Lonbain and it was a pleasure to help him in his researches there.

Another good friend of the Society, Murdo Livingstone of Plockton and Lewis, visited in July. Mr Livingstone has been generous with material and expressed his disappointment that none was on view. The space available to us round the panels that form the main theme of our exhibition is limited although there is scope to display a few items for a finite time, as we did for the MacKenzie Clan Gathering visit. However, the problem will be solved once Phase II is completed.

Also in July we had a visit from a great-granddaughter of William Collie whose Memoirs were copied to us by Mr Gordon Macpherson, Arineckaig.

In October a visitor from Paris introduced himself as a descendant of Roderick MacBeath from Lonbain who emigrated with his family to New Zealand, sailing from London in 1863.

A MacKenzie visiting us is nothing unusual in this year of the Gathering. However, this one is married to an American lady who is a descendant of William Murchison. He came to Applecross from Lochcarron to run the Shore Street public house, and his son, John, emigrated to America c.1851. Mrs MacKenzie presented us with a booklet, 'Meet the Murchisons' and a CD of biographical sketches. The family story is also told from another angle by the late Captain William Murchison in his book 'Master in Sail' available in our Centre.

Michael McDermott of Minnesota keeps us informed via John McKeown's info@applecrossheritage.org.uk. In August he told us about the passing of Ann Mackay granddaughter of Flora MacRae who married Roderick Gollan of Hillside House, Slumbay. He kindly suggests that anyone wishing information on her death can contact him. If you wish to make contact with Michael, please e-mail us. Michael has moved from his old farm and is in the process of selling most of his Highland cattle. However, his interest continues and he prides himself on having recreated Aurochs, the long-horned wild cattle that formerly roamed Europe, south-western Asia and North Africa and are considered the ancestors of domestic cattle. He suggests the possibility of world travel and trade predating our modern history and thinks that the use of DNA and knowledge of weaving and animal husbandry technologies might give valuable insight into a lost culture. Perhaps, when he makes his promised trip to Applecross, we shall hear more about his interesting theories.

Angus Bethune, Secretary of the Highland Family History Society, has provided us with a copy of the 1851 Census Index for the parish of Applecross. It will add to the considerable information supplied over the years by Ann Bishop and the listing of names in alphabetical order is a good quick reference. The total population of Applecross is shown as 2,709 and this compares credibly with the figure given in the 'New' Statistical Account of 2,892 for 1831. Both figures relate to the wider Applecross parish of the times.

Lorna Cruickshank, Highland Council Heritage Officer, sought our help in connection with a panel inspired by Pictish stones being created by textile artist Ruth Black for an August exhibition. We provided both leaflets, thanks to Nick Goldthorpe's prompt assistance, and some photographs taken by John McKeown. Also, we noted our interest in displaying the exhibition at some stage during its planned tour. Unfortunately, although the display was scheduled to be in Lochcarron for a month we could not be accommodated. Perhaps later!

Ian Jolly has contacted us on the subjects of the milestones on the old coast road and telephone exchanges. On the latter subject, Alistair McCowan has contributed the expertise he gained when relieving the MacKinnons in his student days. We are in correspondence with Ian over discrepancies in an old map. He has shared his papers with us.

These are some examples of the activity of the Society.

NEW PUBLICATIONS AND ASSOCIATED MATTERS :

Roddy MacLean, the freelance journalist, writer and broadcaster will be well known to all Applecross people. It was a delight to meet with him and his family, including his sprightly father, Finlay and his mother, 'home' from Tasmania, this summer. Roddy has been supportive of our efforts from the beginning. He has recently written an excellent book on 'The Gaelic Place Names and Heritage of Inverness'.

Roddy drew our attention to the work being done by Fiona MacKenzie of Dingwall who has collected songs for the publication 'Òrain nan Rosach'. Fiona is Highland Council's Màiri Mhòr Fellow (and now the 2005 Mod Gold Medallist!). He suggested that she would be interested in Duncan MacKenzie's 'Gog Gog', composed in the '30s about an Ard Dhubh cockerel who deprived the people of their sleep. The song mentions most of the then residents of the village. We have responded appropriately.

In addition to those mentioned in the correspondence above, other publications that have come to notice include Thomas Kilbride's 'Spinning and Weaving at Home'. This was first published in 1980 and we are grateful to Tom for providing us with copies for sale in the Heritage Centre. As before, the Kilbride family continue to support us.

Bob Pegg, Arts Worker for the Highland Council Community Learning and Leisure initiative, has produced a pair of CDs, one Gaelic and one English, of Alec John Williamson's 'Tales of a Travelling Man.' Copies are available at Bob Pegg's address, Ardival, Strathpeffer, IV14 9DS and cheques for £11 to include post and packing should be made out to Highland Council. We have obtained a copy for our archives and Bob has kindly promised to look out copies of recordings relevant to Applecross, including one that we did of the late Nan MacRae a few years ago.

The irrepressible Marion MacBeath has sent us a well produced CD entitled 'No More Waves for the Isa.' Like many of us she has been saddened by the sight of the Camerons' former fishing boat deteriorating at Avoch and the song, sung by her brother, Duncan, is her memorial for that well known craft. We were pleased to have a copy of the CD. Marion wondered if Applecross Historical Society could possibly acquire the boat and put it on display at Clachan. Even our resourceful chairman felt that this might be an artefact too far and we had to decline.

Following the reported success of his 'Tourists' Guide to Applecross,' Murdo Angus Sutherland has kindly let us have a sight of a draft of his autobiography, inviting us to make what changes we see fit. Margaret McCowan has retyped the material incorporating our suggestions and it is at present back with him. It will not surprise those who know Murdo when we say that this short work is finely crafted and, in its patent honesty, a good read.

Regular readers of 'The Scots' Magazine will have seen James D. Cameron's article 'Appreciating Applecross' in this month's issue. This short item (less than 300 words) is accompanied by some excellent photographs. Mr. Cameron is to be congratulated on recognising that the name Applecross refers to the peninsula, a point lost on many who insist on applying it to Shore Street, Applecross!

Ronald Black, former Senior Lecturer in Celtic at Edinburgh University, has been in touch. He recently edited 'The Gaelic Otherworld,' John Gregorson Campbell's works on superstitions, witchcraft and second sight, and was kind enough to acknowledge some information provided by us. He has also written a biography of John MacKenzie, born in Gairloch in 1806, who is best

known for preparing the first edition of Uilleam Ros, Sàr Obair. Ros was born in Skye in 1762. He worked in Gairloch as schoolmaster and catechist and is acknowledged as the leading love poet of the Eighteenth Century. There is an unconfirmed Applecross story that his ill-fated romance with Mòr Ros of Stornoway commenced when he met her in Applecross house. Mr Black has been unable to contact Gairloch Heritage Trust who may have an interest in the publication, which coincides with the 200th anniversary of MacKenzie's birth.

He has given us an account of his cycling visit to Applecross in the '60s when he was one of Kenny MacDonald's students. He speaks highly of him not only as a lecturer but also for the hospitality of his home in Ard Dhubh.

TIME TEAM VISIT :

This event was fully reported in our last Newsletter and members will wish to know that we have now been told that the programme will go out on British TV, Channel 4 on 9th April.

Interest in the archaeology of the area has been intensified by the visit, and an Applecross Archaeological Society has been created. Applecross Historical Society is interested in the progress being made by this body, and our Chairman was present at its meeting with John Wood, formerly of Highland Council, and Noel Fojut of Historic Scotland.

As anticipated in the earlier report on this matter, we registered our interest in treasure trove with the relevant panel. In order to compete, we should have to register as a Museum but it has been concluded, following further advice, that we should maintain our present status and, as with the Kenneth MacRae brooch, seek to have specific items on loan as appropriate.

APPLECROSS GAMES DAY :

We had our usual presence at this event with Alistair McCowan and Ruairidh Cameron in attendance. Alistair had prepared a well-researched paper on brochs for display. Thanks to Nick Goldthorpe, again, for his help.

TALKS AND OTHER ACTIVITIES :

Ian Fisher, formerly of RCAHMS, arrived to lecture in the middle of torrential rain that made the road to the Centre impassable. With great good humour he agreed to appear on the following evening instead. Although attendance suffered from the change, those who attended had a most interesting evening and we are in his debt.

The talk on the Fernaig Manuscript by our own Rev. Kenneth MacDonald on 14th October was a great success and well attended. Before his first retirement, Kenneth was Senior Lecturer in Celtic at Glasgow University.

The Torridon walk, organised by Mary and Murdoch MacDonald, took place on Saturday 22nd October. Catriona McCowan's report on the outing as it appears in the minutes is hereunder:

'Torridon walk to shielings – this was a most interesting and informative walk led by Murdoch and Mary MacDonald. Leaving from the Coire Mhic Nobuill car park, we took an easy 2½ mile (5m return) walk up to Achadh Beinn Dearg at the back of Beinn Eighe. Murdoch and Mary provided us with an excellent leaflet, written by themselves, on the history and names of the area. Our sincere thanks go to them for giving of their time and expertise so generously'.

The leaflet to which Catriona refers is now in our archives. It was a pity that the walk was so poorly supported and we need to look to our publicity if we are not to offend those who give their time and expertise so willingly. Alan Gillies, who had also attended the lecture on the previous week, came up from Linlithgow to be there. The MacDonalds continue to support us and we are grateful for their interest.

Plans for next season's lectures include an invitation to Dr Henderson who is now in better health and another to Bridget MacKenzie of Dornoch who will give a history of piping. Thanks to Mary MacDonald for her suggestions.

We are grateful to the many who are active in the Society and in particular to John McKeown who has made himself indispensable over the years. Much of John's work goes unsung but we shall be heavily dependent on him as we move towards the new reading room. John works to high standards and keeps the rest of us on our toes by looking for the same standards in others.

We thank Ann Bell Phimster who has produced her manuscript extracts of the burial records at the local Highland Council office. These have now been copied to our archives. At the same time Donald Cameron has given us an extract from the Old Parish Records, relating to the MacDonalds.

FINALLY :

In the second Newsletter in succession, we note with regret the passing of another stalwart supporter of our work, Nan MacRae, nee Ferguson. She was full of enthusiasm for our project when it was first mooted and among the first to provide artefacts. Although in advanced years and indifferent health, she attended many meetings including our initial 'soft' opening in June 2002 when she switched on the lights to mark the opening. As mentioned above, we interviewed Nan a few years ago. She was a natural and relaxed subject who talked easily, and without prompting, about her interesting life. We shall miss her.

It is pleasing to note that copies of the newsletter are now also being sent to Zambia and Swaziland.

Bliadhna mhath ùr dhuibh uile!

IMck

APPLECROSS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP REMINDER

Annual membership fee is £5 which should be forwarded to the Secretary.

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