



APPLECROSS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Comunn Eachdraidh na Comraich

Web : www.applecrossheritage.org.uk

NEWSLETTER - JULY, 2006 Issue No. 14

APPLECROSS HERITAGE CENTRE :

GENERAL :

This has been the year dominated by Phase II. Leader + and RACE have been financially supportive. Alistair McCowan's professional skill has ensured that planning and estimating with their attendant planning permission and building warrant requirements have gone smoothly. Early in the year the building contract was awarded to Allan Cross and the extension to the much admired existing building commenced with the building of the new stone wall on 15th March. Progress has been steady despite the early indifferent weather conditions. Thanks to Alistair's good management we have been able to accept an offer from the builder to upgrade the floor using European larch.

Simultaneously, John McKeown's meticulous attention to detail has guaranteed that a suitable new computer with laser jet printer and associated equipment has been acquired.

By the time our season commenced, the external structure of the building that will form our new reading room and store was secure and work proceeds with only the minor inconvenience of storing some equipment in the exhibition area. In due course both sections will be united when the wall to the west is breached so that a communicating door may be constructed.

John has copied our collection of recordings, including those of interviews with members of the community, some done locally and others from radio programmes over the years, so that they will be available for visitors to hear and see. Bob Pegg's professional work with the school features.

Central to progress on making representative material from our archives available both in hard copy and on computer has been the work of our French student, Elodie Chopin, who has patiently set about typing and scanning material while also working as our attendant. Elodie has swiftly established herself as both highly competent and cheerful while carrying out what can be a tedious task.

Meantime, the generosity of Applecross Trust continues. The bulbs provided last year have made a brave show; the garden area between the Centre and the old Manse has been fenced to make it deer proof. Material has been supplied that enables Kate Cameron to work her magic with a show of plants and shrubs. She and Ruairidh have laid out and maintained a most attractive area and we are grateful for their hard work, too.

Trading figures for the year so far show a similar pattern to previous years. We have again experienced a drop in attendance in the weeks after Easter and this confirms the wisdom of last year's closure during that period. Membership stands at 173 and the new database reported below will help us to monitor performance in this area.

It is notable that the material for sale in the shop offers a wider choice than formerly and again we are grateful to Ruairidh and Kate for the range of products supplied by Johnson's Jewellers of Dingwall. The number of books available for reference purposes continues to grow.

As mentioned above, there is some congestion in the Centre as we await access to the Reading Room. We have recognised the need to be more disciplined in our displays and, in particular, the requirement to process material for exhibition through the registration system already in place. Specifically, the exhibition screen created some years ago by the talented Fiona Porteous has become dilapidated and,

while it does contain much that is of interest still, it was agreed that it should be removed and repaired, if possible. One commemorative scroll has already been reframed and is ready to be displayed.

Also, material displayed in binders needs to be more user-friendly and properly labelled. The Old Parish Records photocopy in particular is unreadable. Outwith the meeting, it is noted that Donald Cameron is working with a much improved copy and we look forward to benefiting from that. He has already, as reported in issue 13, presented us with an extract on the MacDonalds.

The meeting was also advised that some material had been added improperly to the old computer which is John McKeown's responsibility.

During the year, as part of the drive for excellence, membership of the Scottish Museum Council was again considered. It was agreed that the matter should be reviewed no later than January 2008 in the light of progress.

NEW DATABASE :

As part of our determination to improve our performance, the ubiquitous John McKeown has set up a splendid and professional membership database. This user-friendly device makes the maintenance of membership details, issue of reminders and response to queries more efficient, thus both reducing the Treasurer's burden and making the Auditor's work more straightforward. Once again we are indebted to John.

TIME TEAM :

Following last year's excitement, Nick Goldthorpe has received the report prepared by Wessex Archaeology for *Time Team*. He will seek permission to copy the report to us.

VISITORS/CONTACTS :

Ann Bishop made her customary visit in May. She is working on the 1901 census details with her usual dedication and thoroughness and brought with her not only the particulars for District 3 (Camustiel to Milton Gardens) but also a rewrite of the 1841 details for Crowlin. We continue to be grateful for her support.

Tom Wright, a producer from BBC Radio 4, came to Applecross in time for the Applecross Seafood and Music Festival on the weekend of 9th to 10th June and recorded interviews. It transpired that Tom has Applecross connections. He is Sarah Wright's first cousin!

A spin-off from the visit of the Clan Mackenzie reported in the last newsletter was an email from Ann Mackenzie Stansbarger from Torrance, California who had been at Strathpeffer but missed the Applecross trip as she had been here earlier. Ann was most complimentary about our website and newsletter and enthusiastic about the positive feedback from a friend who did visit. She promises to join our membership and has exchanged ideas on Applecross history.

Gairloch Museum has come up trumps in response to a question asked by another of our Mackenzie visitors about the Gairloch Mackenzie Coat-of-Arms. We now have a firm contact with Gairloch's new curator, Nicola Tayler and, from the depths of our own experience, wish her success and stamina in a demanding job! We are also grateful to Miss Isobel Mackenzie of Strath, Gairloch and the Museum, who kindly supplied a photograph of a fine example of the Coat-of-Arms that appears on the south wall of Flowerdale barn. We trust that Liam Mackenzie of Kent is now content after his lengthy wait!

John Livingstone, cousin of Murdo, found us on the net and contacted us with his memories of Applecross contemporaries at Plockton High School and the crew of the *Loch Toscaig*.

Early in the year, we were emailed by Annette Hurdis of Australia who was seeking information about the Rev. John McQueen (contributor to the Old Statistical Account) and we were able to link

her with her kinsman, Andy MacQueen who is an old friend of the Society.

Our link with the Waipu House of Memories remains close and we continue to exchange newsletters.

Last year we were advised that they are collecting funds to erect a gravestone to mark the resting place in Auckland of Captain Murdoch Mackenzie. Mackenzie, who was closely involved in the travels of the Rev. Norman MacLeod and his supporters, was born in Prince Edward Island but taken to Applecross by his expatriate father so that the family could receive an education, it is said. The Society has made a contribution. When she was in New Zealand last year, Fiona Mackenzie contacted Betty Powell of the House of Memories and took some photographs of the cemetery.

Liz MacBain of BBC Alba got in touch while researching Gaels in extraordinary circumstances for a future programme. While we felt that we had no-one who quite met the 'extraordinary' criterion we responded as follows:

"I do not think that we have anyone quite as unique as the examples you quote! However, I list some who might be of interest.

The Applecross family of the 19th century that were closely connected with Rev Norman Macleod of Stoer and in particular Captain Murdoch Mackenzie, buried in Auckland, are the subject of a short paper I prepared for our directors recently when the Waipu House of Memories mentioned that they are collecting money to mark his grave in Auckland. I attach a copy of the paper.

The Murchison family of Toscaig consisting of five sons, the oldest born in 1884, distinguished themselves. Two were sea captains with their Master's tickets in steam and sail, one was a doctor and another an engineer (Chief electrical engineer at the Abadan Oil Refinery) the final son stayed at home and was a crofter/fisherman. Captain William Murchison wrote 'Master in Sail'

Dr Alick Gillanders was senior medical officer with Royal Dutch Shell.

His brother Farquhar, Major 5th/7th Ghurkhas, later became Registrar, Glasgow University.

Duncan George Murchison was Professor of Geology, University of Durham and Pro-Vice Chancellor.

Rev Kenneth D Macdonald. Glasgow University and Cambridge. Lately Senior Lecturer in Celtic at Glasgow University.

Captain Kenneth MacDonald of City Line.

Professor MacBeath of Torgarve and Queen's University, Belfast.

Should any of the above be of interest please come back to me.

Le dùrachd,

Ian Mackenzie"

I have no doubt that members can add to the list. I did remember to advise Liz separately of the two Applecross boys who were Moderators of the General Assembly of the Free Church in successive years, a notable achievement in the years shortly after the Disruption.

Among our many contributions, we welcome papers kindly supplied by Ian MacLean, formerly of Arrina, which relate to his late father's wartime experiences.

MURDO ANGUS SUTHERLAND :

In the last newsletter we reported that Murdo had sent us the draft of his autobiography and that following Margaret McCowan's retyping and some adjustments we had returned it for his approval. The booklet was produced locally by the McCowans and, with Murdo's encouragement, put on sale in the Centre with a proportion of the proceeds to go to a cancer charity.

Sadly, very soon afterwards Murdo passed away peacefully. When I visited him, shortly before his death, he was greatly pleased that we had carried out his wishes. We talked about Applecross and its people. He reminded me that the last time we had such a conversation was in the beer tent at Applecross games and we both knew that we were unlikely to see each other again in this life. He was laid to rest in Clachan and the attendance at the service, conducted sensitively by the Rev. David Scott, was testimony to his popularity in the birthplace he had carried in his heart throughout his life. His autobiography, the *Tourists' Guide to Applecross*, and the many articles in our archives are

evidence of his writing ability and the talent for story telling that characterised his family. Our condolences go to Margaret, his widow, and the family.

SOCIETY INVOLVEMENT :

We were represented at the April Map Seminar in Perth and also at the Lochcarron and District Business Association wine and cheese evening on 23rd May when John McKeown, Ian Mackenzie and their wives met with other members and ensured that our Society activities were advertised. A link has been established, thanks to John's activity, and will be of mutual benefit. We have a representative member on the Scottish Place-Names Society but he was unable to attend this year's conference.

NEW PUBLICATIONS :

We mentioned Roddy Maclean's *The Gaelic Place Names and Heritage of Inverness* in our last newsletter and are pleased to report that we have in stock copies of that fine work and of his more recent *Leabhar nan Litrichean*, a compilation of his well-received *Letter to Learner*, broadcast as five minute items on Radio nan Gàidheal over the last seven years. The latter is also available on DVD and carries translations.

While on the subject of books, it should be mentioned that we have managed to acquire one copy of *Memoirs of William Collie* which, readers will recall, was presented to us in CD form by Mr Gordon Macpherson of Arineckaig three years ago. The book was published as a limited edition by Highland Printers, Inverness, in 1992 and our copy was supplied by an address in Norfolk and advised as the only one in stock. Mr Collie had an involvement with Applecross at the time when the Duke of Leeds bought the estate.

ONE MAN'S RECOLLECTIONS :

The following letter was written by Peter Cheyne after we had met with him and his wife Jean at an East Lothian funeral. The Cheynes live at Barbaraville but keep their boat at Arisaig. Many of us will relate to his account of a holiday in the Applecross of 1950 when the poor communications had already started the decline on the North Coast that was to culminate long before the road that could have provided a life-line for the area arrived. The letter is produced with Peter's permission

"Many thanks for the booklets which I am reading with interest. I was sorry that I did not get a chance to chat about Applecross a week last Wednesday.

My parents were good friends of two families with Applecross connections. Firstly Rev. Roddy and Mona Smith. Mona I think was the daughter of a Mr Macleod who was minister in Applecross in the 20s and 30s. In fact Roddy and Mona were at our wedding back in 1965 and Roddy conducted a very nice service at my father's funeral in 1985. The other family you may know are the Gillanders, a Dr Alec and his wife Rae (both deceased I'm afraid). They were out in S Africa for many years returning somewhat disillusioned in the 50s. Alec was great fun.....

My father was a founder member and also past secretary of the S.Y.H.A. and took me, my cousin and a friend on a hostelling trip to the West in 1950, the memory of which is still very clear. We had left the car at Achnasheen, taken the train to Kyle and got the Loch Seaforth (I think) the Stornoway boat for Applecross. We had to disembark (as you know from your own experience on many occasions) into a small launch that met the steamer in Applecross Bay and then to the Pier. We had a fine hospitable reception from the Gillanders family and then by means of a sailing fishing smack across to Lonbain- thus saving us boys a long walk.

The S.Y.H.A. had just procured the old Lonbain School for a hostel. We were the only hostellers there and we boys had a dorm downstairs and my father slept upstairs. There were blankets but no beds

and we slept on the floor where there were still the screw nails from the old desks protruding.

After a night of high jinks our cotton sleeping bags were in tatters. Dad was not at all impressed!!! There was an old coal stove in the kitchen which the warden, an old bachelor crofter, looked after. I think the main crofting family at that time were the Finlaysons (or perhaps Fergusons). They invited us down for tea one day and it really was an amazing feast. All the men folk including us boys sat round a table laden with food and the ladies of the household waited on us but did not join us. (Jean is not at all impressed! But we were). The next day we went out in their fishing boat (rowing) lifting lines and creels. Although even in those days of the summer of 1950 most of the crofting township was derelict the two or three working crofts looked a paradise of well tended small fields of grass (grazing and hay, corn (oats) and potatoes). Now the land is unproductive and derelict. Such is 'progress'. Tragic. Another abiding memory that appealed to our boyish humour was the toilet facilities at the hostel. There was a fairly large shed, behind the main school house, with two doors – one on the back, men, and one on the front, ladies; but inside there was an open space with two dry closets back to back with no partition. So it was the heather and bracken for us!!

We then walked over to Kenmore and over Loch Torridon by ferry to Inveralligin.

It really was a memorable holiday and brought home to me the injustices and iniquities that have been carried out by our political masters and landowners on our native population over the years leaving behind an unproductive wilderness which many people and bodies are trying to perpetuate – not realising that it is a man made wilderness.

Now with our own boat we are lucky to be able to enjoy our wonderful West Coast and have visited lots of anchorages that I am sure you will know like Pol Doin, Kenmore, Badachro and S.Rona to name a few.

We are looking forward to our next trip to Applecross when we will certainly visit the Heritage Centre and view things with even greater interest having met yourselves"

OTHER ACTIVITIES :

Eleanor Beaton has received funding to research the Gaelic background, stories, and experiences of Applecross. This personable young lady has become proficient in the language and is interviewing Gaelic speakers in the community where she has a wealth of material to tap, commencing with her father, Norman. We have provided assistance for what is a worthwhile project and wish her every success.

Bealach, the Applecross organisation whose objectives were set out in our last newsletter, are now engaged in a Gaelic multimedia project which involves the creation of a DVD covering Applecross history. It is due to be completed in 2007. The Society has supported the project and three of our directors are actively involved. Material has been supplied from our archives and we wish the undertaking success.

FUTURE EVENTS :

Our own events, all in the Heritage Centre, commencing at 7.30pm are as follows:

Friday 21st July: Roddy Maclean will do a presentation on his book *The Gaelic Place Names and Heritage of Inverness*

Wednesday 6th September: Bridget Mackenzie will lecture on piping with reference to the Applecross contribution.

October (Date to be decided) Kenneth D. MacDonald will make a welcome return and talk on Applecross Place Names with emphasis on the different linguistic layers represented.

With our own researches well progressed, the organisers make no apology for concentrating on two

different aspects of the subject this season and certainly none for having the good fortune of having not one but two men of Ard Dhubh on the rostrum!

Bealach are also promoting an appearance by Clan in the Hall on Friday 8th September. A splendid array of talent headed by Mary Ann Kennedy will be in attendance and the céilidh deserves to be well supported.

Please make every effort to support these events.

IMcK

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