



**GENERAL :**

This has been another successful year. With 1,620 visitors compared to 1,871 last year, we reflect the National pattern for 2006. As usual, we have had a number of interesting visitors and contacts. Phase II (Reading Room and Store) is still under construction and it will be ready for next season which commences at Easter.

The year has been dominated by construction of the reading room and stores, with effort concentrated on the transfer of our principal documents both on to computer and into hard copy suitable for use in the library. This involves the scanning of documents and, since the quality of much of the material is poor, much manipulation and, in many cases, re-typing.

Unfortunately, our archivist, he of the plastic boxes and mounds of paper, has been indisposed at this critical time. We all wish Ian Mackenzie a speedy return to his former robust health.

John McKeown has for the moment taken over the work of organising the archives, and this work is progressing well. Margaret McCowan is working closely with John and Elsie to provide typing and re-typing services. John's expertise has again been recognised in a commendation award from the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions (ASVA) for our website in 2006 in the small organisations' category. We rely entirely on volunteers of which John is one - as we do not have the resources to contract web design to specialists. Our award resulted entirely from in-house voluntary activity. John does not seek the limelight but we recognise that his work in the background keeps us up-to-date with computer activity. It should be mentioned that he has arranged for the Newsletter to be made available in PDF form for ease of downloading. His professional attitude and his always seeking perfection are an inspiration.

We much enjoyed having Elodie Chopin, a French student, working with us from April to July. She undertook work of transcribing archive material while also being the attendant at the Heritage Centre. Elodie is completely bi-lingual and speaks English without a French accent, so she fitted in perfectly.

The Heritage Centre garden, under the control of Kate Cameron, is becoming established and we look forward to a creditable display next season.

**ARCHAEOLOGY :**

Our associates – Applecross Archaeological Society – secured a grant to continue investigations at the broch site at the campsite. This was managed for them by John Wood, and Cathy Dagg was also involved, both good friends. We await production of the report following activity at site but we understand that much positive discovery took place.

**VISITORS/CONTACTS :**

The undernoted tell about some, but not all, of the visits and contacts that have enlivened our year.

Ann Bishop made her annual visit in May – before the midges she hates took over – and we have benefited from her further researches into the 1901 census. Ann remains a great friend and we much enjoy her annual visits.

We also enjoyed the visit by Neil Bett and his family. Neil is a son of Deirdre Bett, whose parents were Kenny Murchison and Isobel (Ross). Kenny was at one time a senior member of the Abadan Oil Refinery in Persia (Iran) and one of the well-known five Murchison brothers from Toscaig. Neil came to see us from his current residence in Bristol. Deirdre has had a few medical problems but Neil was able to report that she has made great, typically Murchison, recovery.

We also welcomed our good friends John and Patricia Kerr in September.

The Rev. Dr Kay Gauld and Rev. Ranald Gauld, the husband and wife team who cover the charge of St Rufus, Botriphine and Grange, visited in the course of their research for a booklet which covers the link with Maelrubha and we were happy to share our information with them. They have now produced their booklet and we hope to have copies available for next season. As they left Applecross with 50 copies of our booklet, we owe them as much.

In June Tom Wright, cousin of Sarah, interviewed some of us for a Radio 4 programme in the series *Excess Baggage*. He has forwarded a CD of the item which is appropriately entitled ‘Sanctuary’.

Mike Morrison of California contacted us on seeing photographs of members of the Ross Mountain Battery on our website. His grandparents came from Rothesay. Correspondence with him has highlighted his interest in the Bute, Ross & Cromarty and Argyll Batteries and we have exchanged information.

We had a query from Douglas MacLean, London, regarding his grandfather, apparently known as The Cladaidh, who lived on Shore Street but was understood to have been buried at Annat. We struggled with this one until we asked Murdoch MacDonald of Alligin for assistance. Problem solved! The word Cladaidh for Mason is not, to our knowledge, used in Applecross but Rory the Mason was a kenspeckle figure on the estate in the ‘30s and ‘40s. So, after a false start we were able to furnish Douglas with the information he sought. He tells us that his mother, Rory’s daughter, lives in Inverness.

The Time Team visit mentioned in our last Newsletter has had a spin-off in that Professor Aston of the team has kindly provided us with copies of the results of his aerial photography at Clachan.

#### **MURDO ANGUS SUTHERLAND :**

Murdo Angus Sutherland’s booklet, “An Applecross Story” has proved very popular. It was a privilege to take over his manuscript just before his death and to publish it.

#### **CLACHAN CHURCH :**

Eight years ago, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century building was purchased from The Church of Scotland by Applecross Trust. Previously, for many years, the landowner had leased the building which is now in a serious state of disrepair. As is well-known, it is on the site of the monastery established by St Maelrubha in 683 AD.

This winter the windows have had to be reinforced temporarily to prevent them being blown in by the winter gales. The roof and internal galleries are also in need of attention, with the gallery now

too unsafe to be used. Our Chairman has given his professional advice to the Trust and we welcome the initiative to have the building repaired. There is a clear preference to return to the original style of windows. It is understood that an appeal for funds has been launched.

## **REPORT ON BEALACH :**

The organisation *Bealach*, and the involvement of the Society were reported in Newsletters 13 and 14. We are grateful to our Secretary who has provided the material for the following update:

The Bealach Group is the name for the Applecross Gaelic Group set up about three years ago. The group was set up in order to

- Promote awareness, interest, education and participation in the Gaelic language, traditional culture and music of the Gaidhealtachd, and in particular that of Applecross.
- To plan, programme and arrange activities on its own initiative, or with other local musical, arts and educational societies and organisations.
- To plan, programme and present tuition festivals structured to highlight the musical, cultural and educational objectives of the group.
- To support any other events or activity that will help develop the use of Gaelic language within the Applecross area.

In its short history, it has been instrumental in buying books, videos and tapes for Gaelic learners which may be borrowed and used at home; and in setting up evening classes where the tuition is entirely through the medium of Gaelic.

*Bealach* provided the base on which a croileagan (play group) for under 5's was begun. This is now in its second year.

The *Bealach* Group runs the local Feis, Feis a' Bhealaich, as paid-up members of Feisean na Gaidheal. The Feis movement was set up to enable young people to participate in Gaelic music and culture. This movement came into being 30 years ago and has been very successful all over Scotland in providing an environment in which skills can develop and mature. A resurgence of talent and creativity is an ongoing result.

In September this year, *Bealach* was able to host a concert as part of the Blas Festival in Applecross village hall. The Blas Festival takes place every September in venues all around the Highlands. Our concert, which featured Clann – two leading Gaelic musical families – the MacKenzies of Mabou, Cape Breton, and the Campbells of Greepe, Skye – was extremely successful, and *Bealach* will be hosting another Blas concert during the first week of September 2007 – mark it in your diaries!

2007 is a very special year for Scotland, as Highland culture is to be celebrated across the country. Highland 2007 is making funding available for individual projects. *Bealach* has secured funding to make a DVD about Applecross' unique Gaelic heritage. At this point the script and storyboard have been completed. A high quality camera has been purchased and filming will begin in the new year. It will feature contributions from Kenny MacDonald, Ardubh, Applecross, retired senior lecturer in Celtic at Glasgow University, Dr John Purser, Skye, musicologist with specialist knowledge about Maelrubha and the early Celtic church, as well as many contributions from the local community. We hope to have the DVD on sale by Autumn 2007.

*Bealach* would like to acknowledge funding from Bord na Gaidhlig, Comunn na Gaidhlig, Highland 2007, Feisean na Gaidheal, Highland Council, and Highlands & Islands Enterprise.

## **APPLECROSS IN 1952 :**

Our good friend, Dave Collins of New Zealand, who traces his ancestry to Captain Murdoch MacDonald of Applecross, has provided us with much information and recently sent the following anecdote now reproduced with his permission. As Burns has it:

‘O wad some Pow’r the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as others see us’

“I was doing some work on another part of my history and found this item about which I had forgotten, but which better belongs in the Applecross section where it now resides. It adds a little to the folklore of Applecross and could be appropriately accompanied by old photos of the road.”

### ***“An Event in the Early 1950s.***

After returning from our 1996 UK trip to work at New Zealand Steel, an acquaintance, from the UK, asked me how the holiday had been, where did we go, etc. As I was describing the gnats at the Applecross pub, he suddenly said “I stayed at that pub in the early 1950s.” I was rather surprised since in those days Applecross was known by few people and was not on a route to anywhere. He told me about it.

He thought it was when he was 13 and on summer holiday from boarding school. His father had just bought the first car the family had ever owned – John Anderson is a very highly educated and knowledgeable person but he has no idea what the car was, but it was small and either pre-war or just post-war. He recalls being crammed in the back with his brother and all their luggage, so it is probable it was something like a Morris 8 or an Austin 8, or similar.

His father had only just got his driving licence – training and passing the test on the streets of Sheffield. Two weeks later and, heavily loaded, underpowered, and totally inexperienced, they were tackling the challenge of the road to Applecross. No doubt the road was narrower, far less well formed, and the corners would have been rather tighter, in those days – an uncommon environment for the vast majority of drivers in the UK in those times.

John can’t recall much detail – it was slow and noisy and obviously a very difficult piece of the journey. But he can well-remember the only other vehicle on the road that day. Even today the road is substantially a one-lane affair, with passing bays from time-to-time. Well, they met this other vehicle, a laden light truck, on a bend in the steepest and tightest section towards the top. Someone had to move to a passing bay.

Stopped, with the handbrake fully on – and who can ever remember an Austin or Morris handbrake from that era actually doing anything – and his foot hard on the foot brake, John’s father just sat there. There was no way he was going to back down a steep hairpin corner, or two or three.

The previously amiable Scot tried to explain with increasing volume that he had the right of way in that situation because it was nearly impossible to reverse up through those bends. John said his father’s broad Yorkshire accent was largely unintelligible to the Scot, and the equally very broad Scottish accent was just as unintelligible to Yorkshire ears. “I suppose he could have been speaking in Gaelic, but we wouldn’t have known!”

After quite a while of impasse, with a certain amount of passion the Scot got into the truck and proceeded to reverse back up through the corners to a passing bay. John said that ignorant as he was on the issues of driving in any conditions, he could see the driver having a great deal of trouble getting this done, one bend requiring several ‘bites’. John’s father then had his own problems starting off up the hill even though John, his brother and mother, had got out and had to walk up the hill – but not before placing rocks behind the rear wheels.

Eventually, without a lot of good grace, everyone was able to continue their journeys. John

said his father, years later, said he was scared witless by the hill without any complications. He was in a cold sweat over how to cope with the heavy traffic conditions and was imagining what a minor error in steering backwards could result in – several miles down the mountainside.

That evening they were seated in the pub having dinner. John said that fortunately they were in a corner and not clearly visible from the bar in the dim light. The reason was that a local, with colourful but not obscene language, took over an hour to relate his big adventure of the day to all his mates. They were all agreeing that life was difficult enough as it was without “foreigners” messing the district up even more. John’s father would not let them leave the table, even for the toilet, until the men had moved away.

They left Applecross the next morning since, as visitors and in a vehicle that was instantly recognisable by those ‘in the know’ they would be quickly pointed out as unwanted visitors! He thinks they spent three days further round the coast but was unsure just where.

Of all the people I spoke to about Applecross, apart from family members, John was the only one who had even heard of Applecross, and that included the many ex-Scots working at NZS. However, a few of those Scots then visited Applecross during visits back home.”

## **LECTURES :**

We had three lectures this autumn, all of which were very successful.

Bridget Mackenzie lectured on piping with particular reference to the Applecross contribution. Her lecture, with audio contribution, was well pitched and proved to be extremely well accepted.

Roddy Maclean is a good friend, and his lecture on Gaelic Place Names and Heritage of Inverness was well received. It is such a pleasure to listen to someone who is master of his subject.

Kenny MacDonald known to our local older members as Kenny Seòras Kenny is always popular. His lecture on Applecross Place Names attracted our record number of attendees. The lecture, given again by a master of his subject, can only be described as excellent.

## **THANKS :**

As we get close to the end of the year, we should express thanks to all of our directors – and others – who have contributed to our activities – and without whom we would not have been able to progress. Volunteers who manned the centre during the year included Ruaridh Cameron, Janet Mackay, Alistair McCowan, Eileen MacRae, Sue Cornish, Holly Cornish and Sue Grocock. All these contributions are greatly appreciated.

We extend to all our members very best wishes for 2007.

IMcK

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