



APPLECROSS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Comunn Eachdraidh na Comraich

Web : www.applecrossheritage.org.uk

Scottish Charity No. SC030267

NEWSLETTER - JANUARY, 2008 Issue No. 17

GENERAL :

We are pleased to report this year that both the number of visitors and our takings have increased by 19% and 10.4% respectively. All of the grants awarded by Ross & Cromarty Enterprise and Leader + have been paid to us in full and our finances are healthy. We are particularly grateful to Leader + for giving us additional monies to pay for a timber floor in the new reading room. This is of Highland larch, looks great and elicits favourable comment from visitors.

It is of some interest that this year's figures for October were substantially lower than in October, 2006.

READING ROOM :

The reading room houses our two computers and our reference books, the numbers of which have increased by various donations. Those items from our archives which have been computerised are popular with visitors but unfortunately the work of transferring the archives to computer is behind schedule due to our archivist being unwell early last year and also due to the enormity of the task which at the onset was underestimated. We hope to make the reading room more user-friendly next season.

PLACE NAMES :

The work on this project has resumed using 6" to 1 mile maps kindly donated by Ian Mackenzie, and contact has been established with Achiltibuie who have produced very fine maps and a CD covering old place names on Coigach. Alasdair Fraser, their local historian and genealogist (and a Gaelic speaker) is at present on extended holiday in Australia but we hope to arrange a visit to meet him and to see the maps which hang in Achiltibuie Hall in the new year. Our point of contact in Achiltibuie is Peter Muir, a good friend.

WEBSITE AND PROMOTIONAL LEAFLETS :

Both our website and our publicity leaflet were entered in the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions 'Best Website' and 'Best Leaflet' for 2007 and both were awarded "Commended" certificates. This is quite an achievement given that we are a small organisation and we are up against others who can afford to engage professionals, and ours were both designed 'in-house' by John McKeown. We are grateful to John who makes his considerable ability and expertise available to the Society completely free.

ACQUISITIONS :

The Church of Scotland (local Congregational Board) have donated communion silver which has associations with Shildaig. The items comprise two communion cups and two communion plates in a wooden container with separate compartments. All four items are inscribed, "This plate/cup is presented to The Church at Shildaig in testimony of the anxious interest the late Miss MacKenzie of Applecross took in getting the Church built but as Miss MacKenzie did not live to see the Church finished, the gift is sent by her affectionate mother – Edinburgh, 1827."

We are arranging for a secure case to be made for their display next season in the Heritage Centre. Detailed information about Miss MacKenzie and her mother has been obtained from research by Ian

Mackenzie and Alan Gillies as has information about the building of the church and its first minister. It is interesting to reflect that initial discussions about this silver took place with the late Ian MacGregor, Kishorn, who was at the time Clerk to the Church of Scotland Congregational Board.

The Historical Society is grateful for this silver from the Congregational Board and it will be a significant exhibit in the Heritage Centre. At the time the church was built, Shildaig was in the Parish of Applecross, and local Mackenzie Lairds and their Mackenzie neighbouring lairds had acute interests in church affairs.

IAIN MACLENNAN'S HISTORY OF APPLECROSS :

Iain MacLennan from Shildaig has been a good friend and major supporter of our Historical Society and he has now written *A History of Applecross* which he has given to us to sell for the benefit of the Society. Iain is a son of Katie MacDonald from Camustiel who was a daughter of John MacDonald, a well-known local carpenter, who worked on the Estate and was, inter alia, a water-colour painter of ability. Katie became a teacher in Shildaig, married and raised her family there. John MacDonald from Camustiel was known as 'Shonan' and was well respected locally and is fondly remembered by our older members. We are extremely grateful to Iain for donating his very well researched and well written work to us. We regard it as a major contribution.

DAN McCOWAN :

The following article featuring Dan McCowan appeared recently in the Press. Dan was born in Applecross and is a founder member of the Society.

"Dan McCowan from Applecross in Wester Ross was a senior scientific officer for most of his career with the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology in Banchory and he worked all over Scotland on a range of projects from red deer on Rum, to otters at Banchory.

His fondness for Wester Ross, and Applecross in particular, is reflected in the fact that he spent most of his childhood in this area and lives there now in retirement after an interesting and varied career.

Being in the great outdoors was something that was second nature to him as a young person. Being around gardeners and gamekeepers on Applecross Estate from a young age taught him many valuable lessons about nature. These skills were put to good use when he recounts a story early in his career that involved a pest control project for the Ministry of Agriculture where he was the only one on the research team that could actually catch a rabbit!

After completing National Service and then a degree in agriculture at Aberdeen, he worked for spells at the Department of Agriculture and then the Ministry of Agriculture.

But from 1964 onwards, it was working on research into deer on the island of Rum (off the west coast of Scotland) that he is most noted for. As part of a research team, they looked into the feeding ecology of deer, and much of what was gleaned has since informed the effective management of deer in other parts of Scotland. Dan says, "Before research into red deer was carried out, there was no real, structured format of deer management, and herds could get out of control and damage other habitats quite easily. We set up different kinds of vegetation for the red deer on Rum to choose from and then observed the deer and which kinds of food source they preferred.

"From this research, landowners could then decide how appropriate their own land was for sustaining deer, or it allowed them to decide what kind of land they should develop for deer to be effectively reared."

For a spell on Rum, Dan was also in charge of the deer stalkers and as a scientific officer, he also worked on the breeding cycles, reproduction and behavioural patterns of otters at Banchory which he found very interesting.

Since his retirement to his most favourite place, Applecross, he has worked back on the estate he

enjoyed as a boy, working as a gamekeeper and stalker. He is also a prominent person locally, having served on the Applecross Community Council amongst other voluntary posts.

Dan has also observed some of the changes taking place in our environment over the years. He says, "While I watch the birds and other wildlife from my window, I have noticed quite a change over the years. Rabbits have virtually disappeared and I seldom see jackdaws and rooks. On the other hand, the number of hares is probably about the same as it was when I was a youngster.

"The changes are small but over the years become more significant. It is heartening to see the landscape is just as spectacular and that the reintroduction of species like the sea eagle has been so successful. We're so lucky to have such a wealth of nature on our doorstep."

ARCHAEOLOGY :

Further investigatory digs have taken place at the broch at the campsite. They have produced further interesting finds which are being analysed by the experts. John Wood and Cathy Dagg, both professional archaeologists and good friends of the Historical Society, have been involved. We await production of the reports.

VISITORS :

We have had many interesting visitors. Among those have been Anna Brooker from New Zealand. She was researching her ancestors who include Scottish Canadians who travelled from Cape Breton led by Rev. Norman MacLeod, landing first in Australia and then proceeding to New Zealand where they settled at Waipu.

Anna is descended from Murdoch Mackenzie who with his brother Duncan were master shipbuilders and were instrumental in leaving Cape Breton and sailing on to Australia and eventually New Zealand. She, of course, knows Waipu and Betty Powell and we were able to send with her our greetings to the Waipu Heritage Centre. She was a lovely lady and we were pleased to have found some details of her ancestors.

From Pitlochry, the daughter of the Rev. Malcolm Laing the last Church of Scotland Minister to inhabit Clachan Manse, which is located adjacent to the Heritage Centre, was a particularly interesting visitor who spent some time talking to our Chairman.

Frances Davidson, the daughter of Dr. Frank Davidson, who was the doctor in Applecross in the early 1950s.

Carole MacRae whose ancestors emigrated from Applecross on the *Polly* in 1803. Donald Cameron provided her with photographs of Arrina from which the ancestors left.

Australian visitors included Lex Macqueen, a clergyman and brother of Andy Macqueen with whom our archivist has been in correspondence, and Keith Macqueen, Andy's son. These gentlemen visited separately and they are descendants of the Rev. John MacQueen, minister in Applecross from 1777 to 1831 and who is interred in the burial ground at Clachan.

It is always good to see Malcolm and Heather Murchison from Tasmania who again visited this year.

APPLECROSS LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP :

Applecross Landscape Partnership which is led by Applecross Trust has obtained a grant to construct and submit a bid for a major grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. If successful, the major grant will be allocated to Estate improvements and to items of community benefit. We are conscious of, and grateful for, Applecross Trust's support for Applecross Historical Society and its efforts to establish our Heritage Centre and we look forward to receiving further tangible support if the bid is successful. We also look forward to seeing some of the grant used to enhance the beauty of the peninsula which has, over many years, suffered from neglect.

VOLUNTEER HERITAGE CENTRE ATTENDANTS AND OTHERS :

We are grateful for the assistance we have had this season from our dedicated volunteers. They include Isabel Cross; Sue Grocock; Jackie Liube; Eileen MacRae and Liz Wright who have, with directors, Ruairidh Cameron, Janet Mackay and Alistair McCowan, manned the centre. To them we are especially grateful because the feedback we get is of their enthusiasm for the work we are trying to do. We are also grateful to Kate Cameron who has expertly set up our garden and continues with its maintenance to ensure that it comes to maturity with maximum effect.

We must also record our appreciation to Mike Summers who recently arranged for the erection of a further section of fencing to keep deer out of the Heritage Centre garden and is always available in the background to lend ladders and the like which helps us with our routine maintenance. Such actions remain largely unseen and unnoticed but are nevertheless of considerable value to us.

We value also the support given to our society by Mary F. Murchison, Rhibuachan, Lochcarron and the many copies she has provided of her father's book *A Master in Sail*, an ever popular volume we sell in the shop. Mary is a representative of the well-known and successful Murchison family of Toscaig in addition to her brother mentioned earlier.

John and Elsie McKeown continue to provide expert help in the background for all our computer requirements. John's health under Elsie's expert control is improving.

We also receive considerable help from Margaret Beaton who has always been a good friend – her contributions this year included many papers and items of historical interest still to be fully appraised, and a visit to the Heritage Centre with her spinning wheel.

We also say thank you to our many other friends both locally and from further afield who have been in contact to offer material of historical interest and practical help.

RETURN OF THE ISA :

The *Isa* which was temporarily located near to the pier in Camusterrach when she returned from the east coast has now moved to her permanent berth near to the Camaan, the location once favoured by the *Morag* and other fishing boats for their annual painting and maintenance. We look forward to following the various steps in her repair and upgrading which will be carried out by her new owner.

'BEALACH' :

The première of the *As a'Chomraich*, the DVD produced by *Bealach*, our sister organisation, with support from Highland 2007 and Bord na Gaidlig, was held in Applecross Community Hall on Saint Andrew's Day. The event was very well attended by members of the public and a reporter from Radio nan Gaidheal, who interviewed most of those involved in its production. The DVD tells the story of Applecross, through interviews and re-enactments from Mesolithic times to the present day and includes Maelrubha's arrival and creation of the Sanctuary, the Fernaig Manuscript with its glimpse of life of the Mackenzie lairds, local place names and their meanings, waulking the cloth, return of the *Isa*, speculation of some notorious residents, and the importance of religion in a close-knit community. All are held together by the beauty of the landscape, the music and the Gaelic Language. *Blas beag bho aite sonraichte.*

The DVD will be on sale in the Heritage Centre at £10.

BOYNE CURRAGH :

Sheaonachan MacLeod of Strath Gaelic Choir in Skye has donated the Boyne curragh he made for the production of the *Life of Saint Maelrubha*, their contribution to Highland 2007. This curragh (coracle) was used in the production of the *Bealach* DVD. We already have on display a Spey coracle made by Society member Ford Shaw.

NEW MEMBERS :

We welcome with pleasure new members, who will receive this as their first newsletter.

The Society would like to take this opportunity of sending all our members good wishes for 2008.

1st January, 2008

AMcC

If Members wish to receive Newsletters by e-mail as they are issued, please provide your name and e-mail address via the website.

Applecross Historical Society is a company limited by guarantee and a registered Scottish Charity. Our directors are subject to the normal legal directives which govern the behaviour of company directors, and the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator imposes upon us strict controls on our activities. We employ professional accountants and auditors and in all respects comply with requirements of the regulatory bodies.

