



APPLECROSS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Web : www.applecrossheritage.org.uk

Scottish Charity No. SC030267

NEWSLETTER - JULY, 2009 Issue No. 20

GENERAL :

We opened at Easter which, because it occurred in mid April and the weather was great, gave us a very good start to the season. The publicity which Applecross received from the Monty Halls programme (BBC TV) also undoubtedly led to an increased number of visitors.

VISITORS :

Ann Bishop visited as usual in the early part of the year and brought with her additional material painstakingly copied from official records for the 1851 census. This has been typed up by Margaret McCowan and will be added to the material already on computer in the Heritage Centre.

The daughter of the Reverend Malcolm Laing, the last Church of Scotland minister to occupy Clachan Manse who brought poems and other material from her brother Calum's collection of his father's material, together with a photograph of Malcolm Laing.

Duncan Macleod and his two daughters from Tain – Duncan was originally from Coilleghillie and was one of a distinguished group who, over the years, attended Keil School.

Anne Pope (Anne Campbell) and Marcus Campbell, oldest daughter and much younger son of Murdo Campbell one-time head stalker on Applecross Estate.

Sandra Norris from the Isle of Wight. Sandra is a niece of Jessie Mackenzie Ross, primary school teacher in Applecross for many years who married Alistair Ross from Shore Street, a Merchant Navy officer who tragically was lost at sea only a few months afterwards. Sandra provided interesting photographs and other records associated with Jessie.

Karen Donaldson who visited with her sister, mother and aunt and who initially made contact seeking details about members of her family descended from the Rev. Kenneth MacDonald one-time minister in Applecross. In the event, she discovered a wide circle of relatives including Kenny MacLean, Janet Mackay and Donald and other members of the Cameron family currently living in Applecross.

Representatives of Harvey Morgan from New Zealand. We had email correspondence with Harvey whose great grandfather Hector MacDonald born in 1806 lived in Ardheslaig and emigrated with his wife and six children to Auckland, New Zealand – April to August 1856 on the *Lord Burleigh* – at the invitation of his wife's brothers, the well-known 'Prince' and 'The Captain.' It is understood that the family travelled from Ardheslaig to Inverness by horse and cart.

Three children of Neil Sutherland and several grandchildren, 19 in all, took Faolin and Brambles (local holiday homes) for a week at the end of June.

Peregrine and Susan Bertie who have encouraged our efforts since our formation and who visit regularly.

There were many others and we are grateful for their taking the trouble to introduce themselves and having discussion. These discussions are always interesting.

CORRESPONDENCE :

Last year, we exchanged correspondence with John and Olive Hebron from New Zealand who had visited Applecross some years ago and had fond memories, particularly of Lonbain and the Holy Well at the White Gate. At their request, we sent them photographs of the well and they have since responded, promising us copies of the pictures they took on their visit.

John Martin, Archivist and Historian for the Scottish Youth Hostels' Association, from North Yorkshire, has been in touch to say that he intends to visit Applecross in June and asking for information about the Lonbain Youth Hostel. He has been provided with material, including a copy of the article by Peter Cheyne reproduced in our Newsletter Issue No. 14.

ARCHIVES :

We continue to receive material for our archives and the gradual handover of the archive material from Ian Mackenzie to Alan Gillies is proceeding.

APPLECROSS LANDSCAPE PARTNERSHIP SCHEME (ALPS) :

We are actively involved with the development officer and her assistant in working up the details of the various projects which we reported in the last newsletter. All have been taken forward in greater detail and we confidently await further developments.

IAIN MacLENNAN'S BOOK :

Iain has revised and added to his book, *Applecross & Its Hinterland* and, in its revised version with some ten additional pages, it is now available, and the revised version is also available in CD. This work is very popular and sells well and we remain grateful to Iain for donating all proceeds to the Historical Society. Printing is carried out for us at minimum cost in Shieldaig (by Stephanie Ash and Alice MacLennan) and the CDs have been provided totally free of charge by Iain. We note that Monty Halls quarried deeply in the book without a specific acknowledgement and we are considering our position.

VOLUNTEERS :

Volunteers who man the centre and to whom the Historical Society is immensely grateful include Isabel Cross, Sue Grocock, Jacqui Liuba, Eileen MacRae and Liz Wright. Directors who also take part as attendants at the Heritage Centre are Ruairidh Cameron, Janet Mackay and Alistair McCowan.

Margaret Beaton has been in attendance with her spinning wheel and related equipment and her demonstrations and lessons are hugely popular.

We remain grateful to Margaret McCowan for her input in producing our twice yearly newsletter and for taking over the job of sending out email copies to those who request receiving it in this form.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY :

Discussions continue with the Applecross Archaeological Society with whom we maintain close relations. Finds from the digs which have taken place at the broch site are stored with us and we are at the moment considering applying for

membership of the Museums Council which will be necessary in order that we can apply for custody of items recovered after they have been processed by the Treasure Trove Authority.

TRADITIONAL APPLECROSS FISHING :

Fishing has always been an important item in the history and heritage of Applecross. Crofting life involved small-scale farming supplemented by fishing and, in the past, there was a plentiful and sustainable supply. Sadly, modern fishing methods have resulted in an industry which seems to completely disregard the need to conserve stocks and even the few species not already destroyed are being steadily depleted.

Alasdair Macleod, a local fisherman, has written a short but very appropriate paper on the subject which we reproduce below. (Alasdair's father Kenny and grandfather Finlay in their day were regarded as among the best and most skilled West Coast fishing boat skippers, and Alasdair carries on the tradition as a prawn fisherman operating out of Applecross.) Alasdair writes :

"Following a conversation I had with Alistair McCowan about my frustration over the 'Monty Halls' programme, he asked me to write an article about the perilous state of the fishing off the shores of Applecross. My hope in taking Monty out on my boat was firstly to show him how we went about our job and then to tell him about the decline of an important part of our heritage. I had hoped that because he was a marine biologist, it would mean that he would be willing to portray the fact that the majority of the Applecross fishermen are concerned enough about the decline of our industry to adopt voluntary conservation methods, despite fishing alongside other fishermen who appear to take everything they can with no regard to the eco-system they are destroying.

I think we are at a point in history where we should pause and take stock of our seafaring heritage. My grandfather and father, Finlay and Kenny Macleod from Toscaig, both spent a lot of their working lives at sea. Not one species that they fished for is left. One of the saddest things my father said to me was the regret he felt when fishing for 'mazy' herring. (This was the spawning herring which came into the lochs, part of an integrated cycle that took place year after year). The herring, haddock, cod, whiting and hake have all disappeared from these waters and we are now left catching bottom feeders. In scientific terms, this is called 'fishing down'. We are already there in that, after the prawn, crab and lobster, there is nothing left.

What reinforces this pessimistic view is when you have conversations with the more elderly members of the community who tell you how things were in the past. The abundance of sea life as little as fifty years ago paints the picture of a bleak future if we stay on the same road we are on now. In only two generations stocks of all the above have been destroyed.

Stories like the one Alistair told me about the day in 1948 he climbed Beinn Cladach behind Shore Street and counted 53 basking shark fins in Applecross Bay. I am fortunate to see two basking sharks in one year. Monty Halls had to go to the west side of Skye and use a paraglider to see one! I remember Danny Beaton of Uags and Ardban telling me that he used to trawl hooks from his dinghy for fun inside Eilean na Ba to catch salmon from the passing shoals. There are none now.

Ali Mackenzie from Camustiel told me about the night in 1946 when some of the herring drift nets, stacked on the pier, were partly washed off by a high tide and a bit of motion. When Jack MacRae went to sort them out the next morning, there were herring caught up in the nets that were hanging off the pier. Roddy MacRae of Milton recounted the early '70s when the boats, the *Isa* and *Catriona*

amongst them, were catching 60 boxes of cod a day off Applecross. They were also catching 60 stones of big prawns a day using only 300 creels when they were working up at Kylesku. This summer, one of my better catches was 60 kilos of small prawns from 450 creels and as for the cod

The young men coming into the prawn fishing now have never known what used to be in the waters here and, if they make a wage at the prawns, most are not interested. I remember telling a Kyle fisherman that the Applecross boats used to fish off the back of Plockton for big prawns. He expressed surprise that there were ever prawns of that size there. He had been fishing there for ten years and had not caught any that size. This concept has been given a name in marine biology and is known as "shifting environmental baselines" where each generation comes to view the environment they know as natural or normal and the gradual deterioration passes almost unnoticed. If we lose touch with our fishing heritage, the oral and written stories of previous generations that tell us what we have already lost, then the future will, indeed, be bleak."

NEW MEMBERS :

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

If you are already a member of the Historical Society who receives the Newsletter by post but would prefer to receive it by email, please let us know via our website. Also, would members please remember to notify the society of any change of postal address and email address.

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.

