



APPLECROSS HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Comunn Eachdraidh na Comraich

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NEWSLETTER - JULY 2011 Issue No.24

Word from the Chairman:

I think it is very encouraging that we are embarking on what is a new era with our Curator established at the Heritage Centre. We have been in operation since 2003 and it was time for a change and to move forward. In addition, we also have support from Applecross Landscape Partnership for a number of interesting projects which we are keen to progress, namely Gaelic place name collection, Clachan burial ground mapping, archive digitisation, and development of the spout well (holy well) and the four trees of Applecross. I personally believe that an organisation like ours cannot stand still but will slide backwards unless pushed forward. We are in exciting times, with Gordon Cameron providing the driving force necessary, and I confidently look forward to the immediate future. I hope, too, that our many old friends will visit again to see the progress and rejoice with us.

Events

Bardic School

The first Sgoil Bhàrdachd na Comraich was successfully held in June at the Venture Trust building at Hartfield, with some of Scotland's finest poets and singers taking part in a series of lectures, workshops, classes and cèilidhs. The Heritage Centre's Curator also gave a lecture on the theme of *Coille Mhùiridh*, the famous song by Donald MacRae (Dòmhnall Òg Gead an Tàilleir), and associated traditions. No-one fell asleep – a major triumph!

Saltire Society

Alison Wilkie, who many people will remember as a familiar face on Grampian TV, brought a party of twenty-six people from the Saltire Society's Highland Branch to Applecross for their annual summer outing on 25th June to visit the Heritage Centre and Clachan Church.

Upcoming events

A 'Maelrubha' day is planned for Saturday 27th August, with events based at Clachan Church and around the head of Applecross bay. More information to come.

Autumn/Winter Talks

A series of talks and events organised by the Historical Society will take place over the autumn to while away the longer nights! Times and venues to be confirmed. Keep an eye on your email and local press for more details!

15th September - **Willie MacRobbie**: Achgarve, its history and war heroes

13th October- **Roddy MacLean**: The Drovers' Friends: Cattle and Dogs in Gaelic proverb and oral tradition

10th November - **Roddy 'Butcher' MacLennan**: Tales from the butcher's van!

8th December - **Open night**: Photographs and stories

Publicity

Cothrom

Roddy MacLean, a man with very strong Applecross connections interviewed the Curator, Gordon Cameron, in January for the latest edition of the bilingual Gaelic-English learners' magazine *Cothrom*. This offered an opportunity to promote the Historical Society, the Heritage Centre and a number of the key cultural projects happening this year, including the recent Sgoil Bhàrdachd na Comraich.

Radio nan Gaidheal

Gordon appeared on *Prògram Choinnich* at the start of March in a feature about Comann Eachdraidh – local history societies around the Highlands and Islands. Also on the programme were Anna NicSuain from Comann Eachdraidh Nis, Niall MacFhionghain from Comann Eachraidh Ealaghol is na Torran, and Catriona Muir from Comann Eachdraidh Beinn na Faoghla. It was encouraging to find out that we are in a better position than others who have no premises, but there is still plenty of work to do.

Obituaries

Nancy MacDonald

Not only did we hear that long-time Applecross visitor Garrett Ashby had passed away last year (newsletter 23) but Nancy MacDonald of Atlantic Beach, Florida, also sadly died at the end of 2010. Nancy was a supporter of the Historical Society and regularly visited Clachan Manse on holiday. Our condolences to the family.

Iain and Helen Ferguson

Within three weeks of each other, in November and December 2010, Iain and Helen Ferguson passed away at home in Milltown. Their deaths were sudden, unexpected and a shock to the community. Both took an interest in the Historical Society's work, especially with Iain, a very skilful carpenter, having been a member of the construction team that worked on the Heritage Centre. They will both be missed.

Betty MacBeath

A sad winter saw Applecross lose another very popular figure, when Betty, widow of the late John 'Guinea' MacBeath, died in January at home in Camusteel aged 77. Born in Greenock of Applecross and Coast stock, Betty was a familiar and much-loved presence in many aspects of Applecross life. We send our sympathies to the whole family.

Roddy MacRae

After a long illness, Applecross lost its oldest male resident, Roddy MacRae of Milltown. Another much-loved parent, grandparent and friend to many, he passed away at home on March 24th. Roddy had been a fisherman with the Camerons on the famous boat 'Isa'.

He possessed a stunning amount of knowledge about Applecross history and genealogy, and was descended from a man who had testified to the Royal Commission to the Highlands and Islands in 1894. He will be much missed.

Donald 'Dickie' Livingstone

In April, Dickie Livingstone of Ardheslaig and Shieldaig passed away after a battle with cancer. A fisherman and shellfish seller, he and his brother Kenny helped to keep their coastal community alive. Our sympathies to the Livingstone family at home and abroad.

Donations

Ian Mackenzie, one of the driving forces behind the success of Applecross Historical Society, and still one of its biggest supporters, has been sorting through his archives in Pencaitland. Via Fiona, his daughter, have come boxes and cases of books which will transform our reading room collection at the Heritage Centre as well as crates of documents and a substantial run of *An Carrannach* magazines. A massive thank you to Ian for his generosity and continued help. We also received copies of *An Carrannach* from **Isabel Cross** - thank you, too, Isabel!

Our Treasurer was delighted to receive a special package in the mail, all the way from **Heather** and **Malcolm Murchison** in Tasmania. It was a beautiful woven blanket, believed to have been spun, woven and dyed here in Applecross and originally belonged to Malcolm's grandmother Catherine Murchison (née MacLennan) who died in Lower Toscaig, in the family home, in 1932. It is a fantastic donation and very much appreciated. It will find a safe home at the Heritage Centre where it will go on display with other examples of woven blankets from Applecross. Many thanks to the Murchisons!

As mentioned elsewhere in this newsletter, the Society received a very generous and substantial donation from **Valerie Macdonald Chappel**, in memory of her late husband John, when she visited her ancestral homeland again in May. We are very grateful to her, and record that she also made a donation towards the upkeep of Clachan Church. We hope Valerie had a safe trip back to Nevada and that it won't be too long until she returns again.

A display screen has been purchased with the funds donated by the family of the late **Rodney Badcock** which will be dedicated to his memory. Rodney was a good friend who gave much encouragement in our early days and it is fitting that we have a permanent reminder of his support and friendship. His family have a house in Ard Dhubh and keep in touch with the area.

Thanks are also due **Eileen MacRae** and **Catriona McCowan** for donating documents from their own collections; and to both **Ruairidh** and **Donald Cameron** for continuing to boost the reading room's library collection.

Placenames

The Historical Society archives throw up some real gems, and one recently unearthed treasure was a list of place names compiled by Dr Alexander Gillies, Culduie and Inverness. Detailing names he had remembered from his younger days in Ardbain with the late Danie

Beaton, it's a wonderful document. Here's just one of those names which manages to evoke images of days gone by:

Cipean Ali Bhàin - Ali Bàn's tethering-point.

Sitting on the shore to the north-east of the Poll Creadha, Culduie, *Cipean Ali Bhàin* is a rock that Ali Bàn himself (Alexander Gillies of Culduie) used to tie his boat to. All place names are interesting, but one as straightforward and evocative as this is extra special. It connects a man still alive in folk memory to the very place that he worked, walked and sailed.

Alexander Gillies owned the skiff *Bella MacRae*, but he also owned *The Crofter*, an 18-20 foot rowing boat which he used to land seaweed at the Caman, from where it was carted up to the Culduie fields. He replaced that boat with *The Caley*. Could it be that one or both of these boats was secured to *Cipean Ali Bhàin*?

The Historical Society's Place Name Collection and Mapping Project is still ongoing – if you have anything to contribute, even only one name or half-remembered anecdote, please get in touch. As the generations come and go, we are losing a heart-breaking quantity of local lore, so any and all information is valuable and welcome!

Best wishes

The Historical Society sends its best wishes to **Donald Cameron**, Camusterrach, and **Duncan Murchison**, Culduie, and wishes them both full and speedy recoveries. Also **David MacDonald**, son-in-law of the famous Applecross historian Kenneth MacRae, has been unwell recently and we hope he is back to full health very soon.

Visitors

Unfortunately, this little section begins with the sailors who never came! Aiming to reveal "... the spiritual thassalocracy of Irish monks in the North Atlantic from the sixth century onwards," a party of academics, artists and archaeologists were due to visit Applecross on 25th May to see sites associated with St Maelruba. Starting at Skellig Michael and following the west coasts of Ireland, Scotland, heading for Iceland via Orkney, Shetland and the Faroes, it was a mammoth trek, but, due to the ferocious weather conditions of the wettest May in recorded history, or at least that's what it felt like (!), their vessel *Ar Seachrán* sailed past Applecross almost a week behind schedule. Sorry to have missed them; hopefully, the rest of their trip was a success.

The Chappel family did manage to make landfall in Applecross at the same time: **Valerie Macdonald Chappel**, a cousin of the Cameron family who is also descended from Roderick MacDonald, *Rìgh Chraolainn*, came back to her ancestral homeland with her daughter Margot and son-in-law Curt for a visit. Applecross Historical Society is very grateful to Valerie for her very generous donation to the Society, and for pledging money towards the continued upkeep of Clachan Church.

Jacqui Wood, director of Saveock Water Archaeology, dropped in at the end of May with kind words about the Heritage Centre. Jacqui will be known to fans of *Time Team*, having appeared many times as an acknowledged expert on pre-historic cooking and diet.

In early May, **Dr Meg Bateman**, one of Scotland's most acclaimed contemporary poets, visited the Heritage Centre in her guise as lecturer at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, Scotland's Gaelic-language college, and part of the new University of the Highlands and Islands. With students

from her Celtic Philosophy course, St Maelrubha was the main focus as the Curator showed her around *Cladh Maree*, Clachan Church and graveyard; *Lagan na Comraich*; *Suidhe Maree* near Milton fank; and pointed out Saint Island and Crowlin Beag, once known as *St Rufus's Isle* which is believed to have the remains of an early church.

We also had a visit from Historical Society life-member **Ann Bishop**, whose efforts in transcribing census returns have been greatly appreciated; we hope to see Ann again next spring.

June saw a flying visit from David and **Catriona Green**. The Reverend D.A.D. MacLeod, minister of Applecross Church of Scotland from 1929 to 1945 was Catriona's grandfather; her mother was Mona, one of the *Manse Girls*. Catriona was able to fill in some interesting details about her grandfather's time here, and of the experiences of Hal Brown, the little boy evacuated from Vienna as Hitler's forces advanced across much of Europe, and his brother Felix who came to stay with the family in Camusterrach. Interestingly, Hal Brown and his wife visited Applecross a few years ago (Newsletter 10, June 2004).

Volunteers

Once again, many thanks from the Curator to the Directors of Applecross Historical Society for their support; and to the volunteers who give their time to keep the Heritage Centre running during our visitor season. We've lost Sue Grocock and Jacqui Liuba as volunteers this year – best wishes to both with their new and continuing ventures.

Thanks to Rory Cameron, Alistair McCowan, Liz Wright, Rod Coldwell (our new Thursday signing!), Eileen MacRae, Janet MacKay, Catriona McCowan, Isabel Cross, Valerie Hodgkinson and Donald Cameron for keeping things ticking over.

Thanks also to Kate Cameron whose green fingers have the Heritage Centre garden looking great; to Margaret Beaton for enlivening Monday afternoons with her spinning demonstrations; and to John McKeown for helping out with the many new pieces of kit that have arrived at the Centre since last winter! Thanks, too, to Alan Cross for carrying out the building works in the Heritage Centre so neatly. The improvements look great and have certainly made the shop and reading room much warmer places to work!

Stories and snippets

Not everyone changes the world in a dramatic way, not everyone writes a best-seller or finds a cure for a disease. But some do make their mark in a more subtle, understated fashion. In the second row of grave stones immediately in front of Clachan Church is a stone for the Finlayson family of Lonbain commemorating Malcolm Finlayson who died in 1917, aged 93; his wife; his brother; and his children Danag and Mary.

Mary was known as *Màiri Chaluum*, and worked at one time in Ireland as a housekeeper to the Duchess of Westminster. The Westminsters had long held estates in County Fermanagh and Mary Finlayson was employed there for a time. Whilst there, she was horrified to discover that the younger girls in the household staff were having to get up at 5am to begin their daily chores.

She took her concerns to the Duchess herself who agreed that this constituted unnecessarily difficult working hours and decreed that the girls – some of whom would have been only 14 or 15 – could instead start their day at a more civilised 7am. This act earned Mary the permanent gratitude of her young charges who then referred to her as ‘Blessed Mary’.

Màiri Chaluum died on 12th July 1956 at the age of 85 after spending her retirement years in Camusterrach in the house next door to the Church of Scotland. Some folk still remember seeing her drawing water from the well just behind her home. She might not have been famous, but she made a real difference in her own way.

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 by emailing the Curator: gordon.cameron@applecrossheritage.org.uk Also, would members please remember to notify the society of any change of postal address and email address.

New members and donations are always welcome! Details on www.applecrossheritage.org.uk

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.