



APPLECROSS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Comunn Eachdraidh na Comraich

Web : www.applecrossheritage.org.uk

NEWSLETTER - NOVEMBER, 2002

Issue No. 7

HERITAGE CENTRE :

The following report appeared in the August edition of *An Carrannach*.

"As members of the Historical Society will be aware, there has been much activity since Allan Cross completed the handsome structure on the site of a former outbuilding of Clachan manse. Access for the disabled has been provided and the external area has been tidied.

Not so obvious to the passer-by has been the internal activity as Graham Newton completed the electrical work and Alistair McCowan carried out final touches including the installation of plumbing.

Alistair and Kenny MacLean have worked hard erecting backing for interpretive panels and shelving for the reception area. The Kilbride family, Ford Shaw and Rona MacPartlin were among those who ensured that this area was stocked with material for sale. John and Elsie McKeown have laboured to get our website up and to incorporate a wide range of information including Ann Bishop's manual extraction of census records. Fena Scott and Margaret McCowan have checked the transferred census material for accuracy and visitors are now able to trace Applecross ancestors readily. Exhibits have appeared, including a fine topographical model of the peninsula by Tom and Sean Kilbride. Artefacts are being laid out and a register is being set up.

At the end of June, the first instalment of the panels arrived and these are now in position.

While the formal opening of the Centre will not take place until autumn, Alistair had become aware of regular, no doubt welcomed, interruptions as he worked. Curious visitors were stopping to investigate the new building. With a good sense of priorities, he provided a box for donations.

The Society decided on a 'soft' opening once the initial panels were in position and so it was that, with no formal advertising, representatives gathered at noon on Monday, 1st July. The wisdom of the decision was obvious when about forty people turned up to hear Rev. David Scott pray that visitors might be refreshed spiritually and physically, and to see Mrs. Nan MacRae switch on the lights as a symbol of the opening. Mairi Summers had taken readily to her holiday employment as caretaker and her artistic touch was in evidence as she prepared the display in the reception area.

While most of those who attended the opening were visitors, some of them from Saturday's wedding, we were delighted to see that our good friends, John and Patricia Kerr, had made the journey from their Perthshire home to be with us for the occasion. They presented a visitors' book which John had inscribed, 'From sure foundations may this heritage centre go from strength to strength'. Those of us who catch our breath before plunging into the work of the home straight as we head for the formal opening say a heartfelt 'amen' to that!"

FURTHER PROGRESS :

We have received a video of the opening reported above from George Eldridge and record our thanks. The *An Carrannach* report envisaged an opening in the autumn. As this would have involved either a further split delivery of the interpretive panels or an unacceptable work load for our professional expert which, at best, would see completion by the end of the season, it was agreed that the formal opening would be delayed until the spring.

The decision to open to the public with little more than a third of our panels in place, albeit with a donations box instead of an admission charge, has been vindicated. By imaginative locating of artefacts and use of the backing boards awaiting their panels to set up text and photographs, the organisers achieved a full and comprehensive temporary display which was well accepted by visitors.

With over 1,200 visitors in the first four months giving generously, it is clear that the potential identified in our initial business plan is really there. As advertising has been limited meantime, it is reasonable to assume that with good publicity and professional signage, we can look forward to further success when the exhibition is complete.

When Mairi Summers, our attendant, returned to her studies in September, the centre was kept open for a further 5 weeks by Margaret McCowan on a voluntary basis and we acknowledge our debt to her.

It has been a delight to welcome so many interested and supportive visitors and to see how many of them react to the commemoration of the coming of Christianity as they stand beside the model of the monastery and look out on the site. This focal area has still to be completed and when the Maelrubha panels, with their text based on the work of Ray Burnett, Director of Dicuil Institute of Island Studies, are finalised, we believe that we shall have helped to correct centuries of neglect of this notable Saint and his legacy. As Kenneth MacRae, FSA, has it in his draft history, in reference to the burial place of the last of the lay abbots who fell at Harlaw and was reputed to have been buried near the grave of Maelrubha: 'What the illiterate natives commemorated for over four hundred years, one educated generation despised and forgot.' It has been our delight to attempt to correct this in a modest way.

WEBSITE :

John McKeown's progress with the website was reported in the last issue of the Newsletter. We were impressed, as we have been with all of his self-effacing computer work, and our confidence was amply rewarded when, at the recent annual conference of the Association of Scottish Visitor Attractions (ASVA), it was announced that we had won 'best website' in the small category (less than 10,000 annual visitors). This is, indeed, a substantial achievement and bodes well for the future of the Heritage Centre. Well done, John. See for yourselves at www.applecrossheritage.org.uk

COMPUTERISATION OF ARCHIVES :

We have been reviewing the amount of material held in our archives. It became clear at an early stage that the need to make text on the panels readable and interesting meant that much material would not be on display. Equally, there are restrictions on the amount of paper which can be made readily accessible to visitors with specific interests. Space in the 'shop' area of the Centre is at a premium.

Accordingly, it has been agreed that the archivist will review the present list of papers which runs to well over 200 items, with a view to removing minor and irrelevant material and identifying an order of priority in which papers will be transferred to our computer. It is recognised that this will be a major task. We have volunteers to help John when the initial sift is completed.

TARTAN :

Further to the mention of the Applecross Tartan in the last Newsletter, Alan Gillies has supplied us with further information and we have the sample kindly provided by Liz Wright, together with input from Mrs. Oliphant and Sir Ian Macdonald of Sleat which has led us to Jim Callander of James Pringle Weavers in Inverness. Mr. Callander is an acknowledged expert on tartan and gives his opinion that the Applecross tartan appears to be based on Macdonald of Sleat and Middleton. As Lady Julia, wife of the first Applecross Lord Middleton, was herself of the Macdonald family, it is a likely explanation.

VISITORS :

We were pleased to welcome Mrs. Joan Oliphant and her son Roddy Oliphant to the Centre. The daughter of the 10th Baron Middleton married into the distinguished Oliphant family in 1909, so we have another connection with the Applecross Middletons. Roddy was most helpful to Alistair McCowan and Ian Mackenzie in arranging their visit to Isle Maree, noted for its association with Maelrubha.

In October, we were delighted to see Aidan MacDonald, formerly of University College, Cork and a strong supporter of our efforts to mark the history of the Applecross monastic settlement. He was pleased to hear that we were maintaining contact with Dr. Fojut of Historic Scotland and John Wood, Highland Council Senior Archaeologist.

We were particularly pleased to have a visit from Ronnie Cameron in his wheelchair.

SHIANT ISLANDS :

Those familiar with Adam Nicolson's excellent book, 'Sea Room', will be aware that it makes reference to the finding of a stone on the Shiants with a four-armed cross set in a carved circle and to a subsequent suggestion that the Torridonian sandstone might have come from Coilleghillie. Mr. Nicolson has been in touch with us and photographs from the supposed area have been provided to him, although he now advises that this type of sandstone exists near to the Shiants. The connection is exciting, however. The carved stone could have been the pillow stone of a follower of Maelrubha who sought the eremitic life.

While mentioning stones, it should be reported that Ian Mackenzie has been in touch with Mrs. Mona Smith about the font mentioned in the last Newsletter. Mrs. Smith has a wealth of information and he hopes to visit her soon.

FINALLY :

We continue to receive interesting material and documents and send thanks to all contributors. Keep them coming! We are indebted to Richard Wills for his interest in the material on computer and for correcting some of our early errors.

It is planned to arrange lectures in the New Year.

Alistair McCowan and Ian Mackenzie have met with representatives of the Army, referred to us by The Applecross Trust, with a view to exploring the possibility of their assistance in the development of a car park and toilets.

Volunteers continue to be in demand. The west wall of the Centre needs to be pointed and we still have a list of items required as text or illustrations. Contact Ian Mackenzie.

Ian Mackenzie : Tel. 01520 744271 or 01875 340563