



APPLECROSS HERITAGE CENTRE :

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

'APPLECROSS HISTORICAL SOCIETY - OPENING OF THE HERITAGE CENTRE

The opening of the Heritage Centre took place on Good Friday, 18th April, in idyllic conditions with blue skies and record-breaking temperatures.

It was pleasing for the organisers to see friends from a wide area but unfortunate that a number, including our exhibition designer Steve Tomlinson, life-member Ann Bishop and Gaelic adviser Roddy Maclean, were caught up in other commitments over the Easter week-end. They, and many others, including our friends at the Waipu Heritage Centre in New Zealand, had sent their good wishes.

Well over a hundred people attended, packing the Centre building and overflowing into the tented area, to hear the opening speeches.

Society chairman, Alistair McCowan M.B.E. welcomed everyone and paid comprehensive tribute to all who had contributed to the completion of the project. He then introduced John Kerr F.S.A. who, with his wife Patricia, has supported the development from the start, providing encouragement and material, notably old maps of the area.

John, speaking of his long association with the peninsula, reminded us of the tradition of the ladder corrie access to A 'Chomraich, used before the Bealach road was built, and shed further light on origins of the Applecross name. He commended the enterprise and gave further encouragement.

Richard Wills, Chairman of the Trustees of Applecross Trust and the fourth generation of his family in Applecross, opened his remarks by referring to Alistair's own contribution to the work of the Heritage Centre, without which it would not have been created. He went on to demonstrate his own research into deer-hunting tales of the past and to express the hope that the new community development might flourish.

As Richard drew the curtain to display the bi-lingual welcome panel and declare the Centre open, John MacDonald from Alligin, who had earlier piped to welcome the guests, struck up 'Cabarfeidh' to enthusiastic acclaim.

A fine buffet with tea and coffee followed. Guests did justice to the excellent spread and took time to examine the exhibition at their leisure. They were kind enough to make many complimentary comments and their reaction bodes well for the future.

The goodwill demonstrated by so many friends of the Society has been encouraging. It is now up to the community to support this small beginning to the marking of the unique history of the peninsula. It would be find to build on the hard work of the last three years. The signs are good. There is a pleasing spirit about and it is reassuring to see more volunteers being involved.

The late Kenneth MacRae, F.S.A. wrote of the last resting place of an Applecross hero of Harlaw :

"What the illiterate natives commemorated for over four hundred years, one educated generation despised and forgot".

It was good to see his daughters at the ceremony on Easter Friday and surely a token that this generation will neither despise nor forget.

Come and judge for yourselves. The Heritage Centre is open from noon to 4 p.m. on Mondays to Saturdays until the end of October.

IMcK

April, 2003'

UPDATE :

After the euphoria of the opening ceremony, the work goes on. The Centre is being staffed by volunteers, with Margaret McCowan taking the brunt of coverage from the Good Friday official opening in April until the end of May. Ian Mackenzie, Janet Mackay and Alistair McCowan have also served as attendant. We have other volunteers and we will make use of their services in the weeks to come. The customary dip in tourist numbers in the weeks following the Easter holidays has been evident but visitor numbers have been at the expected level. The most encouraging aspect has been the interest and enthusiasm shown by so many who appreciate our efforts. Some have been able to add to our collection of material, including individuals from our local community.

John McKeown has now placed photographs of the opening ceremony and of the Centre on the website.

The Society continues to collect Gaelic place-names. Work done by Alison Macleod in the first year of our existence is now supported by material offered at meetings and provided by members. These include Roddy and Jean MacBeath, Mrs. A. Fraser and the ever-helpful Dr. Alexander Gillies. Blank maps have been prepared for issue to interested parties so that they may give information on their own areas.

The artist Barbara Webb has kindly given us some samples of her work which might be suitable for reproduction and sale by us. Michael MacGregor, photographer, who was supportive when we were seeking illustrations for our panels, has let us have samples of his work for possible stocking in our small shop. Jim Buchanan has volunteered to support us by producing and circulating a neat laminated sheet advertising our presence. Mary Murchison has generously gifted us 6 copies of *Master in Sail*, her father's book and these are now on sale in our shop.

As most of the Newsletter is written by Ian Mackenzie, his own huge contribution tends to be overlooked. It must be remembered that not only did he research details for the panels and pass the text to the consultant but he personally collected the panels from Tees-side and conveyed them to Clachan in two separate consignments and then assisted in their fixing.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DIG :

On the weekend of 22nd February that saw the final display panels in place, Kirsty Cameron from the office of Highland Council's Archaeological Department, assisted by an impressive number of volunteers from the Historical Society, carried out a mini-dig at two points on the line of the vallum suggested by Professor Thomas. While nothing of significance was found, John Wood, Senior Archaeologist, emphasises that this does not mean that the vallum does not exist and that further work will be carried out as finance permits. Meantime, we acknowledge our appreciation of the support and advice received from Mr. Wood's office.

VISITORS :

It has been wonderful to meet so many lovely people. Our good friend Ann Bishop came up soon after the formal opening and, as usual, brought with her further details of her painstaking research. This time she added to the papers previously supplied from the Middleton Collection with particular emphasis on the solicitors' exchange of correspondence regarding the settlement of the Duchess of Leeds' life-rent. By happy coincidence, the Centre was visited soon after by Gordon MacPherson, Arinekaig, who subsequently kindly provided the Society with a copy, on CD, of the Memoirs of William Collie. This

worthy man was in the employment of the Duke of Leeds when he purchased the extended Applecross Estate and subsequently witnessed the division of the estate on the death of the Duke. The 'inside story' is a useful supplement to Ann's work.

Margaret F. Macrae has contacted us following a visit to Applecross with her mother, Helen, who was moved to poetry when visiting the ruined houses at Lonbain and reflecting on those who emigrated. We also had a visit from Jayne MacDonald, a descendant of Roderick MacDonald of Crowlin or 'Righ' (King) as he was known. An evening with Bob Pegg and his story-teller colleague on the evening of 13th June was well attended.

It gave us much pleasure to see Duncan John Gillies in the Centre. The wider Gillies family have given much to the display and archives.

Iain Matheson has sent us a copy of his booklet *A Voyage Round My Father's Land*, a guide to visitors to Lochcarron. It has a fine section on Applecross. His name appears in our visitors' book.

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS :

In the immediate future, we plan to improve signage. The small signs made by Alistair have served their purpose but a number of people have commented that we are difficult to find, so a higher profile is needed.

We have also almost exhausted the stock of *A Glimpse of History* and a second edition is planned. It is also evident that the amount of information available on display cannot fully be absorbed on one visit and there is a need for a booklet reproducing the material shown on the panels. There are copyright and cost implications here but we are examining a quote from Steve Tomlinson.

However, the major aspects of Phase 2 include the creation of a car park and toilets together with an access road. Negotiations with the Army, reported in the last Newsletter, continue. The possibility of developing the area round the Centre to include an open terrace and, perhaps, storage facilities, is being addressed. Highland Council's allocation of toilets, having regard to the steadily increasing number of visitors to Applecross, is demonstrably inadequate, so we may have to fend for ourselves.

It cannot be over-emphasised that, with most of our money spent on work done so far, even the most modest development is dependent on funds. We do not envisage that the income generated by admission fees and donations will cover anything more than running costs and even there we are indebted to those who, at present, give their time freely.

We look forward to some sympathetic tree planting in the area as part of any overall forestry programme by Applecross Trust. Essential to this will be the need to take the advice of the County Archaeologist to avoid encroachment on the site of Maelrubha's monastic settlement.

NEWSLETTERS :

Newsletters are normally sent by post to members but are alternatively available on request by e-mail.