



### **APPLECROSS HERITAGE CENTRE :**

The Centre has taken much of our effort since Issue 8 was printed, so readers will understand if the bulk of this issue is concentrated on how it has performed in its first full season. We hope that they will also forgive an element of self-congratulation as we look back. During the three years it took to plan and set up the Centre there were times when frustration and difficulty coloured our perception to the extent that some of us felt that they might reflect in the finished product. We need not have worried. The positive and complimentary feedback reported on the opening day has continued throughout a most rewarding year. John McKeown's contribution in the award-winning website and the wealth of material incorporated on the Centre computer have been much admired. Photographs of the opening ceremony now feature there.

Those of us who acted as volunteer attendants were aware, from the start, of the special quality of our visitors. Irrespective of age, they were interested, usually well informed, enthusiastic and appreciative. A glance at John Kerr's visitors' book shows an embarrassing spread of flattering comments but more importantly we have made friends with so many from all over the world, not least with the fellow who breezed in announcing that he was from Applecross and turned out to be from Applecross, Western Australia. His comment in the book was, 'Just like home!' With all the positive and uplifting comments we have had only one criticism, as distinct from the many helpful suggestions. This came from a man whose background may be imagined and was on the lines that we had over-emphasised the importance of the Clearances! Those who would deny history have no place in the Centre!

In addition to the four Directors and Margaret McCowan, we are indebted to Ruairidh and Kate Cameron and to Fena Scott for giving of their time as attendants.

We are still collecting material, both artefacts and papers, for the archives. Notable during the year were the coracle presented by Ford Shaw, Milton, a whale bone loaned by Clive Goldthorpe, a pine marten pelt given by his daughter Alison, a quantity of old newspapers recovered by Ian Reynolds of Torridon while redecorating and a collection of old tools also provided by him. Murdo Gillanders has come up with a couple of two gallon petrol cans of the type once widely used by early motorists. Much other material is secured in garages until required. The coracle now takes pride of place in the Centre. It is understood from Roddy MacRae that, when Ford had completed it, there were interesting sea trials on Milton Loch!

Among papers being added to the archives are an extract from The Free Church Monthly record of 1891 which covers a visit by an official from the Ladies' Highland School to Callakille, a Guardian article of 1980 on Applecross, an extract from Salmond's 51<sup>st</sup> Highland Division which mentions the circumstances of the late Duncan MacBeath's award of the DCM, a matter that the man himself would never talk about, a press cutting about Applecross Australia, provided by Mrs Connie Beaton and two documents received recently from Murdo Livingstone of Plockton and Lewis, one a programme for a grand concert in

1927 in aid of the Northern Infirmary and listing well loved Applecross names and the other a statement dated 1936, issued by M & N Gillanders to a Mr Morrison in Stornoway for a suit at 7 Guineas. Jane Eldridge, whose family and friends swelled the attendance at our 'soft' opening in 2002, has sent some excellent photographs of the hill fires that raged behind the Centre and elsewhere during the spring. The grandson of Dr MacLeod who practised in Applecross in the '20s brought photographs of the doctor, including one with the *Sheila* in Applecross Bay with another vessel in the background. Tom Kilbride has provided internet extracts covering Chris Fraser's autobiography, the Iolaire disaster and the work of Alistair Alpin MacGregor while we have had an opportunity of examining two old books, *Brave Sons of Skye* and a *General History of the Highlands* covering the period from the first Century through to the nineteenth, lent by Margaret Ferguson. These are just a sample of the interesting material that comes our way. We are also grateful to Alan Gillies for his provision of a number of copies of early maps with his own commentary and, of course, Ann Bishop continues to search for matters of interest related to the Middleton and Leeds connections. On her visit this year she also provided us with an example of her poetry.

The list of papers held is in the process of being updated and a copy will be available in the Centre for future reference. It is appropriate to mention at this point that a lot of material comes to us with no provenance. It is the policy of the Directors that such acquisitions will not be included in the formal archives unless their source can be established.

One aspect of work in the Centre is the incidence of queries from visitors. Many make use of Ann Bishop's census details on our computer, and we are able to advise those who wish to research families further, while, of necessity, emphasising that we do not ourselves undertake such research. However, we are happy to enter into correspondence as resource permits and this year have responded, for example, to Dr Spooner's request for details of writings on Maelrubha, to Professor Dawson, Coventry University on weather records, to Janet and Steve Lamb who sought a photograph of the late Duncan Mackenzie Lonbain, and to Isabel Bonner whose daughter wanted her to have one of Dan McCowan. Isabel was born in Applecross where her father Charlie Sutherland was a keeper at the Kennels. In the absence of a picture of Charlie, her daughter thought that a likeness of Dan, who like the rest of us of advanced years remember the family well, would suffice!

## **VISITORS :**

The first thing to report is that the level of visitors is remarkably close to the estimates made at the planning stage. The weather has been remarkable throughout the year and the added attractions of the Walled Garden and the Centre, together with the positive encouragement of the Applecross Trust's publicised pathways, have supplemented the success of the Inn and the Camp Site. With good publicity, there is every indication that the Centre will go from strength to strength. New signage was put in place early in the season. At the risk of offending by omission, the following are mentioned.

Shortly after the opening, Ann Bishop, our life member, arrived and spent time at the Centre. It is always a delight to see her and to marvel at her enthusiasm for her adopted special place, Lonbain. She would love to have met Mrs Helen MacRae who, with her daughter Margaret, came to Lonbain to see where Evander MacRae lived before emigrating 200 years ago on the *Polly*. Evander was the ancestor of another friend of the Centre, the Venerable Robert D. MacRae of Victoria BC and Margaret is the great great granddaughter of Pipe Major Donald MacRae also from Lonbain.

Following the visit, she sent us a copy of her mother's poem, written on the Lonbain site. Late in October, by amazing coincidence, the Mackenzies and their cousins were having a

noisy time in the Priory Hotel, Beaulieu when they were approached by a personable lady who congratulated them on their 'happy laughter' and introduced herself as Helen MacRae. The lady, who has made light of her 88 years and blindness, explained how she had sat in Lonbain and waited for the inspiration, which eventually led to the poem we now reproduce with her enthusiastic permission:

### LONBAIN

Composed after a visit to Lonbain deserted village, Applecross 26<sup>th</sup> May 2003

Lonbain, Lonbain- At last I've seen your face,  
How many memories are locked in your embrace?  
Do you recall Evander whose MacRae steps were slow  
As he went to join the 'Polly', 200 years ago?

Off to Prince Edward Island with wives and families too  
They took their Gaelic language and Faith so strong and true.  
MacAulay built a chapel, their spirits to maintain  
Where Evander was an Elder far, far far from Lonbain.

Did you smile when piper Donald just couldn't wear his kilt,  
At the Mysore wars in India where snakes danced to his lilt?  
He's now asleep in Clachan, his first wife by his side,  
His second rests in Ashaig, with descendants far and wide.

Waiting, waiting - As you look out to sea,  
Warm stones retain the melodies and prayers that used to be.

Helen MacRae  
31<sup>st</sup> May 2003

In October Mr Peregrine Bertie and Mrs Bertie, the former Susan Wills, visited the Centre with Lord Napier and Etrick whose ancestor, was Chairman of the Napier Commission of 1883 of which Dr James Hunter has said "...as a delimitation of (the crofter's) social and economic position the Napier Commission's definition has yet to be bettered". The present Lord Napier is particularly well informed on the crofters' struggle. After his visit he wrote kindly expressing his appreciation of our work, and included some helpful papers. It should also be recorded that the Wills' family and the Applecross Trust continue to be supportive of the Centre.

Two former clients of the West Highland School of Adventure came to the Centre and enthused about their experience there. Alan Hesforth and his family were followed by Peter Mylchreest. Alan was anxious that anyone remembering him should get in touch. His details are held by the Society.

In an exciting year with many highs, perhaps the greatest event for many of us was the return to Applecross after sixty-four years of the person we knew then as Heinz Braun an Austrian Jew who came to Camusterrach Manse with his older brother Felix, fleeing Hitler's régime. He is now Harold R Brown, living on West End Avenue, New York and came across here with his wife on impulse. They found themselves staying with Jessie Ann and Angus Gillies with whom he was in Camusterrach School. Visiting the Heritage Centre they found Alistair McCowan and Ian Mackenzie, other contemporaries. His moving email, following their return to America, is in our archives. He is in touch with 'the Manse Girls', Mrs Mona Smith and Mrs Christine MacKenzie to their great delight. They are the last remaining members of

the family of the Rev. Donald MacLeod who, with his wife, looked after the refugees for a critical year.

Yet another connection with our Centre is that many years ago the MacLeod family presented an inscribed Bible to Clachan Church in Mr MacLeod's memory but some years down the line a number of us realised that it had disappeared. It was deemed to have gone forever but this year Greg Barton, Venture Trust Manager, saw it at Hartfield Lodge when his charges were selecting material for the bin, and rescued it.

When he took it to the Centre, Alistair McCowan recognised it and arrangements have now been made, by agreement between the Kirk Session and the family, to keep the Bible in Camusterrach Church. Congratulations all round!

It was good to see Annabel Nicolson, who had been among the early initiators of the Historical Society, when she came along to see us in October. Ishbel McGillivray MacGregor from Inverness a descendant of Thomas Gollan, the innkeeper in 1798, was also a welcome visitor.

After the Centre had closed for the season, the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, the Rt. Rev. Professor Torrance, visited the Presbytery. On Monday 10<sup>th</sup> November he and Mrs Torrance came to the Centre accompanied by the Rev. David and Mrs Scott and Society Directors Catriona McCowan and Janet MacKay. The Society was honoured by Professor Torrance's presence on the site where we have striven to commemorate the coming of the Celtic Church in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century.

#### **LECTURES :**

During the year the Society welcomed regular entertainers Bob Pegg and Judith Aitken with Jess Smith at a story-telling ceilidh on 29<sup>th</sup> July, and on 11<sup>th</sup> October we were pleased to see Dr Karen Hardy and Caroline Wickham Jones from Edinburgh University Archaeological Department who chose to hold their seminar at the Centre. A closing lecture given by selected members of the distinguished group was well attended. Finally, in the last week of October, Jill Harding of the National Trust for Scotland visited to talk to us about the Picts.

We welcomed Aidan MacDonald in August. He visited the local school to meet our Secretary and then was shown over the completed Centre. He has agreed to talk to the Historical Society next year, as has Dr Isabel Henderson, well known authority on the Picts, who has graciously consented to make an exception for Applecross in her retirement.

#### **STRUCTURE :**

After the building was constructed, the gable on the west side, formerly an internal wall, was found to leak when strong wind drove the rain against it, hardly a phenomenon in Applecross, and the resultant dampness had to be cured. As an element of self help it was decided that volunteers should be sought so, on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> August, a merry group of all ages, armed with trowels and supported by Applecross Trust who supplied the materials and a mixer, pointed the wall to a professional standard. The youngest volunteers came all the way from Tunbridge Wells. Well done Steve and Angela and family!

#### **PLACE NAMES :**

We have continued to build on the work done initially by Alison Macleod and following contributions from a number of others including Mrs Annie Fraser and Dr Alexander Gillies both of Culduie and Inverness, the Society has acquired a six inches to the mile map of the

peninsula, supplied by Dr Gorst. In October we met in the school and, placing transparent paper over the map, began to insert the place names so far collected. The map now hangs on the schoolroom wall and those who have not so far passed on their expertise are being encouraged to do so.

### **SCOTLAND FREE CENSUS PROJECT :**

In June, John McKeown was contacted by Bobby Amyes from New Zealand who had volunteered to help with this project which aims to make census details in the UK more accessible. She is the granddaughter of John MacLeay, born in Applecross in 1855! His grandparents lived at Lonbain, Sand and Salacher. The last named is where John and Elsie McKeown have chosen to settle. Bobby, who turned out to be a whirlwind of energy, subsequently visited with her husband, Brian, and explained that when she was typing up the Applecross Census for 1841 she realised that we had already done so. She sought permission to use our work. This matter has been cleared with Ann Bishop and there is now an amicable arrangement whereby Bobby will benefit from our work and in turn we shall be able to access additional detail for the rest of the Applecross peninsula and develop our web links.

### **FINALLY :**

The first edition of the booklet 'A Glimpse of History' began to run out half way through the season and we are indebted to an anonymous member who financed a reprint.

Plans for Phase 2, in which we are being supported by Applecross Trust, continue to be developed.

During the year we drew the attention of the Highland Council Archaeologist to certain finds in the area and also to the need to safeguard the last known Suidhe Mharee, (Maelrubha's Seat) near Achnasheen, during the development of the Kinlochewe/Achnasheen road. It was reassuring to find that Mary MacDonald, Alligin, who, with her family, has been so helpful in our researches, had also taken initiative on this matter.

There is much still to be done and we shall be addressing the need for a more vigorous advertising campaign in advance of next year's opening. Artefacts, written material and old photographs are still welcome and, as noted above, assistance with place names would be greatly appreciated. In that context can we shame some of you by pointing out that one of our major contributors has been Grace Ann MacBeath in her ninetieth year and that she cheerfully agreed to be recorded in an interview with us in October?

2003 has been a most enjoyable year for the Historical Society and we look forward to continued support from members and the community. Thank you thus far!