

# Ross of Mull Historical Centre

## Newsletter

### Tigh na Rois

Visitor Centre  
Bunessan, Isle of Mull

October 2013

#### And the Walls stayed Up!

Last year the headlines were about the Mariota Stone, this year Kilvickeon Church itself has been basking in limelight – benefitting from a little tlc. Following the restoration of the Mariota Stone, and the decision to relocate it outside the increasingly unstable church walls, Historic Scotland agreed to commission an up-to-date report on the condition of the church itself, spurred on by reports from local participants of the Adopt a Monument Scheme/Archaeology Scotland of collapsing masonry, particularly the iconic arched entrance. The result of the detailed report by Krystyna Pytasz of Addison Conservation & Design was that in February this year Historic Scotland granted nearly £40,000 for emergency works to consolidate the fabric of the building.



A team of skilled stonemasons arrived in the last week of March. Enduring searing easterly gales they painstakingly picked out the encroaching vegetation and repointed the crumbling walls with a lime mortar, the mix of which is purposely distinct from any original mortar. Temperatures didn't rise much above freezing for the duration of the work but the wind dropped, the sun came out and the rains stayed away. The work has given the old walls a new sense of security, inviting interest in their unusual construction of the 'opus emplectum' technique i.e. a rubble core - but with the two external skins being effectively only a cladding of thin, vertically placed stones.

Through the Adopt a Monument Scheme we were also granted funds to design and place an information panel at the site, describing some of its history and origins. With the artistic talents of Krystyna and the guidance of numerous voluntary editors with Bidy Simpson, officer for the Adopt a Monument Scheme, and Historic Scotland, the panel was set in place in September.



Following the immense relief and in appreciation of the work at Kilvickeon, in August, director Jan Sutch Pickard, led a delightful Celebration gathering within the Church walls, remembering the past and giving thanks for the present, with poetry and songs in both Gaelic and English.

Interest in Kilvickeon and its artefacts and stones over the last couple of years has stimulated the decision to make a further application for funding to Historic Scotland to complete the stabilisation of all the walls so that this beautiful and peaceful site can be understood and enjoyed by generations to come. At the same time, 'satellite' educational and arts projects will revolve around the site and local history. If you would like to be involved in any aspect of this, big or small, please get in touch with the Centre – it promises to be very enjoyable for all age groups.

**R Burgess**

## Tea, Scones and Stories

Tigh na Rois was buzzing with visitors in the week from 22 May. The focus was on Christina MacGillivray ('Chrissie/Kirsty Burg') who, in the last century, lived and farmed with her brother Duncan at Burg, on the Ardmeanach Peninsula.

Although her home was very isolated, and Chrissie died in 1989, many people remember her – particularly for the hospitality offered to all who came to visit her, to help on the farm, or who were passing by, walking to the famous fossil tree. Chrissie had her own fame, and a special place in many peoples' hearts. So in one week there were nearly 100 people who came to see the exhibition about Burg. All who came were, appropriately, offered tea and scones.



Because folk on Mull remember Chrissie spinning, Sue Clare, one of the people on the Ross who spins, brought her wheel and demonstrated it to a class from Bunessan school, and other visitors. Another day, while there was a Ranger-led walk to Burg, some members of the MacGillivray family, ranging in age from 80 to a year old, had an impromptu ceilidh in the back room of the Historical Centre, with much reminiscing and the kettle constantly refilled. Bella MacFarlane, from Aros, a niece, brought a beautiful picture of Chrissie with an armload of fleeces, which graces this year's calendar. Bunessan Bakehouse even held a 'Tea party' in Chrissie's honour.

By the end of the week all of us, even those who had already read Ros Jones' book **Tea with Chrissie** (still available from RoMHC) had learned more about a remarkable woman. At the same time we had a lot of fun. And scones.

**J.S. Pickard**

Please remember the date of the  
**A.G.M.**

Saturday 26th October at 2pm at  
**Tigh Na Rois**

if you are unable to attend please send in a  
Proxy Form

**2014 Calendars still available at £3.50 each**

**from the Centre**

**The ideal Christmas gift!**

## Ground Maintenance Day

Many thanks to all the volunteers that made the maintenance day such a successful and enjoyable event. A range of work was carried out around the Centre buildings, but a large amount of the effort was in cutting and clearing vegetation on either side of the path in the wildlife area and in trimming back the hedge near the building.

The wildlife area to the south of the burn is made up of areas of species-rich neutral grassland and scrub. The grassland contains a range of herbs, with abundant common knapweed,



bird's-foot trefoil, red clover, meadow vetchling and self-heal. Earlier in the year several species of orchid occur including greater butterfly, common twayblade, northern marsh and heath spotted. In the damper ground along the banks of the burn, yellow flag, meadowsweet, hemlock and water dropwort dominate. Several patches of low, dense willow and bramble also occur and there is an area with maturing birch, alder, rowan and sycamore.

These rich habitats along the watercourse attract a wide range of invertebrates, which in turn attract in numerous insectivorous birds and bats. Reed bunting, sedge warbler, common sandpiper and grey heron have been recorded.

Frogs, toads, newts and common lizards also occur and the flowering plants attract numerous



butterflies such as Scotch argus, dark-green fritillary and small copper.

Management is aimed at mimicking hay-cutting i.e. leaving the herbs and grasses to flower and set seed, then cutting and raking off the vegetation to prevent nutrient build-up in the soil (many of our less common wildflowers thrive better in nutrient-poor soil) and to stop encroachment of coarse grasses, brambles and scrub.

**J. Clare**

## Kilpatrick

Kilpatrick lies around 2 miles (3 km) to the east of Bunessan, in the district of Brolas. The western limit of the area is formed by the March Boundary with the district of the Ross of Mull to the west. The main A 849 road runs through the northern section of the site, with Kilpatrick Burial Ground at its eastern end, on the northern side of the road where the old road diverges.



The name Kilpatrick, or Cille-Phadraig, literally means Chapel of St. Patrick, and the first of a number of enigmas about the area is that there are no known written records of the existence of a chapel, nor have any remains of such a building been identified to date. The burial ground does remain, however, and is known to have been in existence well before 1700. Kilpatrick covers a total area of around 425 acres (170 ha), in a roughly rectangular shape of around 800 metres wide by 2,000 metres long. The site is naturally split between the lower coastal land, which rises in a series of basaltic lava 'steps', and the moorland plateau above the head dyke. The lower land covers an area of around 175 acres (70 hectares) and was, for a period, divided into four crofts by long stone dykes that run north-south from the head dyke down to the sea. A series of fragments of older banks, ditches and walls also occur, which show earlier divisions of the land. These very early boundaries appear to indicate an extensive prehistoric use of the landscape, with divisions very different in nature and orientation to the dykes between crofts. Numerous areas of former cultivation by rig and furrow can still be seen both on the ground, and from aerial photographs.

The earliest known remains appear to date from the Bronze Age (up to 4,000 years ago). The best preserved of these is a cairn that stands on a significant promontory above Dun na Muirheidh (Fort of the Fish Spear), which is thought to originate from the

Iron Age (c. 600BC), but which was then occupied, at least intermittently, through to the late Middle Ages. The large fish trap at the end of the bay may also date from this time. Remains of farm buildings from a wide range of periods are also dotted across the area, including early shieling huts on the high moorland. While working at RoMHC a couple of years ago, Kilpatrick was the area where I carried out a landscape archaeology survey. I selected the site because I knew there were far more historical features present than the few documented in Argyll 3 and other publications. In the end I manage to record well over 150 previously unrecorded building ruins and other features. I also created a database of all the people that had been recorded in documents associated with the area such as Statistical Accounts, burial records and censuses.

Following a recent talk for Mull Historical & Archaeological Society on Kilpatrick it is likely that a walk will be arranged in the near future to view some of the main features in this historic landscape. Watch Round & About for details.

**J. Clare**

## Scoor Cave - Cleaning in Progress

The interest in Kilvickeon Church led to a renewed interest in other 'ancient' associated sites nearby, in particular the Cave on the shore below Scoor. Uneven access to it down a boggy gully doesn't encourage many explorers but the sight of ancient carvings and symbols on its walls are very rewarding. Over the past 30 years the narrow stony gullies had captured huge amounts of flotsam and jetsam, detracting from this very special site, so on 11<sup>th</sup> August after the celebration for Kilvickeon, a hardy group of volunteers spent most of the afternoon gathering and hauling out about 40 bags of rubbish and the ancient remains of an industrial freezer! Many of the volunteers had been unaware of the cave and were astonished by the number and clarity of carvings.

**R. Burgess**



## Memorable moments

Remembering the Ross, our own home-grown reminiscence group, continues to meet about once a month, on afternoons when the Centre is closed to the public. In the last year we have had an outing to Pennyghael in the Past, enjoying the hospitality of Christine Leach, have spent afternoons poring over pictures, puzzling over questions or entertaining each other with stories of schooldays, and have welcomed visitors.

One was Mairi MacArthur, who came with plenty of questions (some of which folk could answer) and reminded us of the many links between families in Iona and the Ross. She also brought a fascinating document from her family archives: the daily log of John MacDonald, the Ferryman on the Sound of Iona between 1934 and 1939. We have borrowed this, with permission to scan in its pages which give such a detailed picture of the life of our linked communities, the cost of travel and who/what was transported, from funeral parties to livestock to pilgrimage groups.



More recently, Ronnie Campbell brought bags of Show schedules and memorabilia to cast our minds back to the long history of Bunessan Show (117 years). Minutes of the Committee revealed some contentious issues (often raised by runners-up!) - but all safely in the distant past. Life was often hard, and though folk managed to hold a Show during the years of the First World War, a poster from 1915 stated: 'Late entries pay double the usual entry money.' We are grateful to Ronnie, with his prodigious memory and sense of humour, for making time to do this.

*The Historical Centre would be grateful to see, and maybe take copies of, material or pictures relating to the Show, Regatta, Ploughing matches - or documents like that Ferryman's Log. All will be treated with great care and (if requested) returned.*

**J.S.Pickard**

## Alistair MacCallum

The whole community on the Ross of Mull will miss Alistair MacCallum, who died in September at the age of 94. A courteous man with a quiet sense of humour, he had many friends and his presence was valued at events from the opening of the Croileagan at Creich Hall to sessions of Remembering the Ross. He's pictured below at the opening of Millbrae Cottage as the home of the Historical Centre.



## Chairman's report

Well it hardly seems like a year since my last report and it has been an interesting year, with work on the chapel at Kilvickeon and clearing the beach at Scoor cave being two of the more visible activities that have taken place. We also had a very successful day tidying up at the centre, we have now invested in a new lawn mower and petrol strimmer and shed to store them in alongside a lot of those maintenance bits and pieces that need to live somewhere, hopefully leaving room for some of the artefacts that are not on display and not needing a steady climate to live in! The mill itself still needs a bit of work to stabilise its structure and as always it would be helpful if we had a few more Directors to spread the work load. Finally

### A BIG THANK YOU

to all the volunteers who have put in so much time and effort to keeping the Centre open all summer. We close for the winter on Friday 25th October, however it will still be possible to visit the Centre by appointment.

**D. Greenhalgh**



The Ross of Mull Historical Centre  
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