

Spring Newsletter 2021

The Importance of Heritage.

It's now over a year a year since we learned about Covid-19 and went in to the first 'lock down' (lock-up?). Those twelve months have had a devastating effect on the heritage sector all over Argyll and Bute (and the rest of the World) – staff being furloughed, volunteers going into self-isolation or shielding, museums and heritage venues closing, loss of revenue – how could it be worse?

But, you know, we heritage lot are resilient to say the least and we are hearing, every day, of small successes: tiny museums with limited opening, archival research training going on via on-line conferencing platforms and 'bubble tours' in some of our most popular venues. Heart-warming, encouraging? Definitely. Despite the stress of work being 'put on the back-burner' we should remember that, as we said in our 2019 Conference, 'Community Heritage really does count – okay?' We all know that you can't understand your future unless you understand your past (to misquote Carl Sagan). Lots of other notables including Churchill, Aldous Huxley and Chinese philosopher Confucius, no less, thought so too!

What this all really means is that 'Heritage Counts' and that is why we are all here, part of this disparate group called the 'third sector' which essentially means – volunteers (with some very helpful professionals who are always there if we need them). There are thousands of us – mostly older folks because that is when we have the time and inclination to give our time and energy to something that resonates with us. We see the value in preserving our heritage – so let's keep on keeping on!

What's Your Story?

Over the last few months, we here at ABMHF, have heard some sad stories and some very heart-warming stories and, for the sake of the historical record, we would like to hear your story, too. Please write to us and tell us what you've been up to, how you've coped and how you plan to survive. We'd love to know (and we *really* need to know – your story will become part of our archive) and everyone loves to read about what's going on in their particular area of interest. Here are some stories from your committee members:

Ardchattan Parish Archive – News from Jill Bowis (Committee Member).

Thank goodness for Facebook to help us stay in touch during these unusual times. It has been lovely to share stories, images and hear from descendants around the globe.

www.facebook.com/groups/ardchattanparish

The wider heritage world has really risen to the challenges of the situation, and it has been

wonderful to be able to participate in a small way in so many fascinating workshops and conferences. The Archive website has a calendar of just some of these if you are interested

<http://ardchattan.wikidot.com/calendar>



Scotland's People started the release of the very much anticipated Kirk Session minutes recently, but sadly, the Ardchattan parish minutes never made it to Edinburgh, and the Muckairn minutes do not include activities from this side of Loch Etive, even when they were co-joined parishes. However, the coming release of the 1921 census WILL be fruitful for our small parish. When things get moving again, the physical parish archive will open up for arranged visits at Kintaline Farm, Benderloch.

Anyone who has connections to the parish, past or present and is interested in being involved with exploring our local history is very welcome to get in touch with Jill - ardchattan@gmail.com
<http://ardchattan.wikidot.com>

A Lockdown Year by Zoë Fleming (Treasurer), Luig History Group

Lockdown started with cancellations - our AGM, a week of archaeological surveying, a Show and Tell event... Then glorious weather arrived and we got into a new rhythm, and found ways to keep members in touch with island history and our new discoveries.



Recording a turf dyke in SW Luig

We continued the walkover survey of Luig's archaeology undertaken with ACFA, the Association of Certificated Field Archaeologists. From April to June - in pairs and self-distanced - we recorded rock shelters, a possible fortified homestead and a pre-Improvement turf house. My diary lists wonderful walks, the ground dry underfoot, full of spring flowers and later on, orchids. We walked the whole of the island bit by bit, recording the boundaries that mark long-abandoned fields and settlements. Stunning sunsets are noted at the end of April. By end of May it was too hot on some days to walk! By early June, the ground was so dry that, walking the ridge between Luig's two hill-top Iron Age forts, we spotted a network of low stone field

boundaries. The drought had revealed a field system, which we think may be late Bronze Age.

Instead of face-to-face meetings for members we started a series of postings about Luig's history, delivered on Facebook, by email and by hand. Our first series was 'History in our Gardens', members sending in suggestions of interesting objects to cover – quern stones, anchors, bothans and coal rees... My visits to take photos often led to chats with members, a pleasant way of keeping in touch. Further series covered 'Luig through Time' illustrated by finds from the archaeological survey, and my series on 'Luig Rocks' on the island's geology.

Earlier in 2020 we'd responded to a public invitation by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) to suggest ways they could assist



Winter marking in NE Luig

community heritage groups.

We asked for help with a LiDAR survey (Light Detection and Ranging scanner that works in a similar way to radar, using lasers to judge distances and depth) of the island and a detailed survey of the (Norse?) boat graffiti on our Medieval church. Suddenly we had the possibility of a LiDAR survey by a small aircraft at discounted cost, raising the money in four days flat, by a crowd-fund of islanders, ‘second-homers’ and other interested parties. HES has processed the data free of charge, and we are now planning to produce an interactive map of the island’s heritage. The survey of the graffiti is planned for later in 2021.

Winter weather was wet and wild, but one task was to mark significant archaeological sites inside areas of new native woodland, so that the sites would be protected from the fencing and digging and the growth of trees. Our latest discovery has been a prehistoric flint arrowhead, turned up by the digging of a planting mound, the earliest evidence yet of Luìng’s long past. It’s been an exciting year under lockdown.

Mull Historical & Archaeological Society, Anne Cleave (Chair)

I’m sad to report that, apart from posting on our [Face Book](#) page and our [website](#), all the activities of MH&AS were put on hold at the first lock down. We rely on walks and outings during the summer, from about Easter to September, with talks and lectures throughout the darker autumn and winter months. A straw poll of members revealed that many were more comfortable sticking to the rules regarding large gatherings both outdoors and inside. As the majority of our membership are in the most vulnerable age group, it seemed both practical and sensible to follow their wishes.



A moment for reflection on Iona.

However, we are optimistic that things will get going again as restrictions are relaxed. Many of our speakers who had agreed to give talks in 2020 were happy to delay their presentations until it was safe and so we will be confirming that they are happy to go ahead for our autumn programme this year. As soon as we can confirm the programme, it will be published for all to see.

The Rockfield Centre, Eleanor MacKinnon (Dep. Chair).

The Rockfield Centre



Although the hand-over of the keys happened in October last year, a formal opening date has still to be announced. As soon as they were able, after the lock-down, Torosay Sandpits Ltd (TSL) were back on site and are currently working through the ‘snagging’ list. In the meantime, lots of events are being held online and you can find out more about them [here](#) The Rockfield Centre has a wealth of interesting information on its [website](#) and you can even take a virtual tour of the Centre [here](#).

Mull Museum, Olive Brown (Committee Member)



Since lockdown last March we have not been able to open to the public, and we are missing meeting all our interesting visitors. Normally we welcome people from UK, Europe, USA and Canada, Australia and New Zealand - and over 40 other countries, from the chill of Greenland to the heat of Qatar, from the jungles of Brazil to the desert of Oman, with South Africa, China and Brazil in the lead. But not, sadly, in 2020.

Hopefully we will be open later this summer, and have reconfigured the layout in line with Covid-safe advice - one way traffic, limited numbers, masks, visors, sanitiser, etc will all be needed. Visitor numbers will be well down - two of the largest cruise ships are now in the breaker's yard.

Although the outer door may have been closed, our [online](#) presence, particularly our archive catalogue, has brought in many interesting enquiries, and our archivist Georgia Satchel has been able to answer most of them, often supplying photographs and documents to expand the replies.

Like many organisations we held our AGM by Zoom for the first time - lacking something by not all being in the same room but enabling members from beyond Mull to be present.

Plans for the rest of 2021

Last year's on-line AGM was so successful that we are planning something similar for this year. The target date is Thursday 7th October, please put it in your diary, so you don't forget. The programme has yet to be decided but, rest assured, there will be some interesting speakers. We would like to restore the reports from members, particularly this year when we can share your trials and tribulations. Mutual support is one of the main reasons for the Forums' existence, so if anyone can help, your fellow members can! The members' reports began at the first Annual General Meeting of ABMHF so it will be interesting to see how things have moved on in the intervening years. Three or four minutes should not be too onerous so do get thinking caps on now so that you are well prepared.

There have been some very interesting opportunities offered by a variety of organisations over the last year and thanks are due to our Secretary Alison Diamond, for circulating them to members. A small group of committee members (Anne, Eleanor and Alison) have been working with CHArts (Argyll and Isles Culture, Heritage and Arts Assembly), under the Chairmanship of Seymour Adams of CHArts, in order to access some of these opportunities. We are hoping to make an announcement in the next few days – watch for an update to this Newsletter.

A wee challenge. While 'Newsletter' is perfectly adequate and explains what this document is, nevertheless, it's a little bit predictable. It could be more 'punchy', relevant - even fun! The next 'Newsletter' is due in autumn so a new name in time for that would be great. Suggestions please to: abmhforum@gmail.com



William (Bill) Leech 1st March 1938 – 26th January 2021

Argyll & Bute Museums & Heritage Forum were saddened to hear of the death of Bill Leech, aged 82. Bill was founder, curator and chairman of Oban's War and Peace Museum. We send our condolences to his family, friends and colleagues both in Oban and beyond. Bill will be missed by many people and organisations in Oban as well as his birthplace of Bromley in Kent.

His career was very varied with years in maritime work where he began as a cadet and then became Master Mariner with the British India Steam Navigation Company. Later Bill was involved with school cruising on the MS Dunera which had been a troop ship.

In 1997, after retirement in Oban, Bill became the town's Auxiliary Superintendent for the Fishermen's Mission, a position he held for nine years.

He also quickly developed an enduring association with Oban's War & Peace Museum. A founder member, he worked tirelessly to develop the museum along with volunteers and later with the board and as curator for the last 11 years. He was still chairman of the board when he died. He worked hard to encourage school visits, and this reflected his strong conviction that young people should understand their local heritage and history.

He also promoted the museum to many and varied community groups, using its artefacts to evoke memories and stimulate interest, highlighting the museum's value to the town and its many visitors from both Scotland and other parts of the world.

Bill enjoyed playing hymns on the piano and was the regular accompanist at the Congregational Church where his wife Carol was the minister for several years.

Bill always appreciated all that was provided through Oban, Lorne and the Isles Hospital and for nearly 10 years was one of the 'paper-boys' in the Royal Voluntary Service team. He was well-known in the hospital and appreciated by staff and patients for his care and interest in them. As his health declined, he eventually became a patient, feeling that he was, still and again, among friends.

(Edited from the Oban Times)

Chair: Anne Cleave; Deputy Chair: Eleanor MacKinnon; Secretary: Alison Diamond;
Treasurer: Zoe Fleming; Committee: Jill Bowis; Olive Brown.

Members of the committee can be contacted at abmhforum@gmail.com

Website: <http://www.argyllheritage.org.uk/>

Face Book: <https://www.facebook.com/ArgyllHeritage/>

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