

## Chairman's Report 2017 - 2018

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, welcome to the Annual General Meeting of Castletown Heritage Society. Thank you for your support this evening. I believe we had a successful year and the following report provides a few highlights.

**Visitors:** As usual we have had visitors from the local area, from various parts of the UK, and also overseas visitors from a wide variety of countries. The Visitors book indicates that we had around 1,500 visitors, a similar number to last year, although the general feeling was that we had an increase in numbers (not everyone signs the book).

Group visits included: Bower WRI, East Clyth WRI, Weydale WRI, Trefoil Guild (ex Girl Guides), Stonefest 58, students from the Orkney campus of UHI, P2 from Castletown School and the Northern Studies Group.

Muriel continues to assist people in their in genealogy research and to track down their family connections to the local area. Muriel has assisted in about 6 requests for assistance in the last year, including one from Australia.

**Exhibitions:** This year these were:

**Hatches, Matches and Despatches:** The exhibition covered customs associated with baptism, marriage and end of life using artefacts and information relevant to the parish of Olig.

**Flagstone Industry:** Our usual summer exhibition aimed at the visiting tourists in conjunction with the Flagstone Trail.

**Crofting and Farming:** This featured a fascinating collection of artifacts, pictures and tales of our crafting and farming heritage.

**Castletown and District Hits the Headlines:** Exhibition featuring newspaper articles from both home and abroad, dating back to 1800s and organised into topic groups under the headings of N; E; W; S.

**Activities:** Over the last year we had a number of different activities.

**Ceramic / Pottery Workshops:** The first one was held in May 2017 and the theme was buttons; the second was held in Nov 2017 and the participants made a variety of Xmas decorations; the third workshop was held in March 2018 with the theme being tea-light holders. All workshops were well attended and enjoyed. Thanks to Elspet Chapman for organising these – due to demand we will be doing more in the future.

**10 Years On Exhibition and Open Day:** This year we celebrated 10 action packed years since we completed the conversion of some redundant farm buildings at Castlehill into Castlehill Heritage Centre. From humble beginnings the Centre has gone from strength to strength. We held an Open Day on Sat 3 June, in the middle of a month-long exhibition showing the development of the building and garden from a derelict shell to the present set up.

I gave a potted history of the activities, workshops and exhibitions that have been held in the Centre since opening. Hugh Crowden and Muriel Murray followed by summarising the hard work undertaken by a small band of dedicated committee and society members to convert the steading and dairy into the multi-purpose facility we have here today. The Open Day was then officially opened by Lord Thurso who, after a supportive and informative speech, cut the superb cake baked and iced by Elspet Chapman for the occasion. Very tasty it was too!

Helping us celebrate the day were displays and activities from other groups who use and support the Centre including Caithness Astronomy Group, North Highland Woodturners, Dunnet Forestry Trust, Caithness Ornithologists (SOC), Radio hams, Olig and District Bee Keepers Association and the art class.

**August Sunday Cream Teas:** Returned by popular demand, they were as delicious as ever and a great success. Our sincere thanks to Helen Gunn and her able assistant, Hugh Crowden.

**Sea Theme Activity Day:** This was run in conjunction with other organisations based around Dunnett Bay and involved various activities related to the sea. At Castlehill we had pebble painting and creel pot making; Seadrift had shell art; Brough Bay had treasure hunts; and the RSPB had guided tours on Dunnett Head. We also had the Wick Rowers taking people out into the bay in their skiff. Certificates were presented to those children who completed the activities. A very successful and enjoyable day with requests to do more like it!

**Wild Food Foraging, Cookery & Story Telling Workshop:** Run by 'Earth for Life' in Sept 2017. Dunnet Forest Trust supported this workshop and allowed us to hold it in the forest and to use the log cabin for the event.

**Boxing Day:** Our traditional Boxing Day afternoon opening, featuring a warm welcome, mince pies, and mulled wine was a success yet again.

**Felting Workshop:** This was held in Feb 2018 and was organised by Sharon Pottinger.

**Archaeology Project:** As our contribution to the 2017 Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology, CHS investigated some of the archaeological sites within Orlig parish. From an initial list of 40 locations, a decision was made to focus on six sites with ready access and landowner agreement. However, we were unable to secure funding within the timescale and the scope of the project was reduced and refocused on community and school involvement. In particular, Thurso Girl Guides have actively participated as part of their Duke of Edinburgh silver award.

The wet sieving facility and the examination laboratory was used by AOC and local volunteers to process soil samples from an excavated broch at Assynt.

**Winter Evening Talks:** This year these were:

- 16 Jan - "Revealing the Mysteries of Caithness" – this was planned as an evening for learning the secrets of Orlig Parish and beyond with Garance Warburton, a member of the Caithness & nuclear archive team. Postponed due to bad weather conditions and rescheduled for 8 May.
- 20 Feb - "Following the Threads of History"- an illustrated talk by Muriel Murray about how the smallest fragments of preserved textiles from the past can reveal much about life at the time.
- 20 March - "Their Past Your Future" – a display and slide show presentation by F/Lt Don Mason RAFVR (Retired). Don's talk was about his experiences and exploits as a bomber pilot, wireless operator and navigator during WWII. It was a very fascinating, enjoyable and yet humbling evening and was very well attended.
- To night, following this AGM meeting, Alan McIvor will be our guest speaker and he will be talking to us about "Old St Peter's – The Ancient Church of Caithness"

**Building Improvements:** The main item of interest here is the installation of our own internet connection and phone line (821120). At the time of the original conversion work a figure of £9,000 was quoted by BT for this work. The work was undertaken a few months ago by BT / Open Reach at a cost of £260! We are delighted with it!

The other item worth mentioning is our acquisition of the Stroma Yawl that you may have noticed in the garden area. This was gifted to us by Wick Heritage Society for which we are thankful. Hugh has been busy cleaning out the inside and recoating it with bitumen – work still ongoing due to the weather conditions. Have yet to decide exactly how best to use this new asset.

**Outreach:** Muriel continues to give talks to groups who request them and Jayne represents us at the Venture North and CASVAG forums in order for us to play an active role in encouraging tourism in the area.

**Future Plans and Activities:** These Include:

- Continuation of the popular weekly art classes with Helen Moore on Monday evenings. People of all abilities are welcome.
- Pottery / Ceramic Workshop/s – TBA
- Metalwork / Smithy Workshop – possibly July 2018
- Millinery Workshop – still exploring possibilities
- Brooch Making Workshop - possibly
- The traditional cream teas on Sundays in August.
- Demonstration day by the wood turners and possibly an Open Day.
- Caithness Astronomy Group public events.
- Scottish Ornithologists' Club public evenings.
- During the winter months we will probably be planning another series of interesting and informative talks.
- Archaeology Project – continuing

**Word of Thanks:** I would like to express my thanks to the outgoing committee members who have served this year. Vice Chairman **Elspet Chapman**, Treasurer **Helen Gunn**, Secretary **Jayne Blackburn**, and committee members **Muriel Murray**, **Hugh Crowden**, **Alex Groves**, **Liz Geddes**, **Alice Morrison**, and **Colin Robertson**. They all continue to use their skills, experience, enthusiasm and hard work to ensure the continuing success of the Society.

Thank you to Neil Buchan, although not on the committee last year, continued to provide invaluable help and assistance with technical issues and also kept our website up to date. By the way, for those who are interested, we have our own Facebook page which is now maintained by Alex Groves, for which we are grateful.

A special thanks to **Irene Wares** for the huge amount of work she does to make the garden look so stunning.

A final word of thanks to you, our members and friends, for your continued support towards the Society.

**Appeal:** As usual, we would welcome any offers of help, in any form, that members and friends of the Society may be able to provide to assist us in the running of the Centre. For example, we would welcome volunteers to join the boiler roster – currently down to four

**Finally:** I hope I have presented a picture of a Society in excellent shape, ready for the challenges of another interesting year ahead. Thank you.