

Helensburgh Heritage Trust

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Newsletter

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Contributions and suggestions are urgently required and welcome!

Ionad Naomh Moluag

Lismore Gaelic Heritage Museum

A short holiday in Oban gave me an opportunity to visit one of Calmac's 23 not previously landed upon. Lismore has a very long history - 6,000 years, with Brochs Duns Cairns Castles and artefacts to prove it. The medieval church - for a time the Cathedral of Argyll - has supported many forms of worship. St Moluag brought Christianity in 562 AD but did not have the public relations team of St Columba on Iona!

In 1994 the islanders formed their Historical Society and after much determined hard work, support from more than 20 sources - the Executive, commercial and charitable funders as well as our local authority, SNH, the Lottery and its subsidiaries, in 2007 opened a Heritage Museum. A purpose built ecologically friendly building contains a Museum of island life through the ages as well as an ancestry research centre, well stocked retail gift shop and a cafe. The latter is operated by an islander under franchise, and I must say that my party enjoyed an excellent lunch. All the rest of the facility is manned by volunteers! At the time I was there it required a rota of 20 to keep the reception, shop, research room and heritage centre open, April to October, from 11 am to 4 pm daily - and this from a total population of about 180!! Out of season opening is had "by arrangement."

On buying admission and having the red rope moved, a magnificent embroidered map, probably six feet long shows off all of the 10 by 2 miles island features - with inter-active lights to identify each. The displays are a mixture of vertical panels and show cases, containing relevant artefacts. Being arranged in sections, it appears that a complete subject may be removed and substituted without disturbing the main visitor route. Very important if public interest is to be maintained. Another much appreciated aspect was that the captions were all readable! Achieved by a combination of typeface; size; colour and being positioned at a height suitable for the more elderly visitor!

Nearby there is a 19th century 'cottar's cottage, furnished as it was when occupied by a known Islander.

Why my holiday memories?

[Continued overleaf]

Whistlefield Revealed!

Following the very interesting talk to the Trust about the Vanished Railways of Old Western Dunbartonshire by our Chairman, Stewart Noble, the question was asked: how did Whistlefield get its name? (it had its own station until the 1960's)

The answer to this question lies in the presence of the old Inn Buildings at the top of Whistlefield Hill. As the name implies, this was once a hostelry. Having its origins in a humble drovers' inn, it later formed a stopping-place for horse-drawn coaches after the modern road was built in the late 18th century.

As a coach approached the inn, a horn or whistle would be sounded to enable those inside to make ready for its arrival, and this is how the name came about. There is another Whistlefield by Loch Eck, and here again there is an old inn. In Glen Aray, near the head of the Glen, there is the ruin of an old inn called Tighafaed. Translated from the Gaelic, this means "house of the whistle, or blast".

Among the photographs in the booklets "Helensburgh Past and Present", by Pat Drayton, and "Old Helensburgh, Rhu and Shandon", by "John Hood, there are different views of what is billed as a "Motorman's Holiday" (sic) A large body of motormen are shown seated on an open-bodied horse-drawn coach. Dating from the early 1920's, a horn is prominently seen in both pictures. This is probably similar to the type of horn that was in use in the heyday of coaching.

Whistlefield Inn ceased to operate as such soon after the end of the First World War. It had gained an unenviable reputation for excessive drinking, and after a change of ownership, the opportunity was taken to mount a campaign opposing an application for renewal of the licence. Led by the Rev. Walter Ireland, United Free Church minister at Garelochhead, and also a county councillor, the campaign was successful.

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Memory Playing Tricks

The phrase "Memory playing tricks" is one with which I have been long, if vaguely familiar. If pressed as to its relevance to myself, I'd probably have been conceited enough to imagine that it didn't apply. Now, however, I have come to realise that I am not immune from its clutches.

I recently had occasion to revisit an episode from childhood. I could recall the great interest when a local shepherd had been "discovered" by a major cereals manufacturer, when he featured in their marketing campaigns, and now I wanted to locate an advert from the time. He certainly looked the part, with rugged outdoor features, though common knowledge was that he never touched the cereal himself.

At this point, I want to emphasise that I would have been prepared to swear on oath that the product in question was called "Crofter Porridge/Porage Oats". To cut a long story short, I found myself in a "needle in the haystack" situation in the Mitchell Library, thumbing through vast bound tomes of "The Grocer" magazine. My one real clue was that I was pretty sure the time scale was 1955-56. Suddenly, there was the image of the shepherd, holding up a packet! The only trouble was that the advert was not for Crofter, but Weetabix! How could I have been so mistaken?

In my initial search, I had been trawling the Internet, and here perhaps lies a clue as to where I had gone wrong. The only real reference I could find to Crofter was someone's reminiscence about the late and great Duncan McCrae featuring in TV adverts for Crofter Porridge Oats, many decades earlier. I reckon that somehow or other, my mind had transposed this to the shepherd episode.

The big question, though, must be: **how reliable is our memory?**

[continued from page 1]

Your Board is, we believe, close to completing negotiations for our use of the former Reference Room in Helensburgh Library. Several new display cases have been bought to add to those already there. Our replica JLB Televisor is at last in working order and will complement the original, owned by Argyll and Bute Council, which has been on show in the Library for some years. We are well ahead with a catalogue of the artefacts and information acquired by the Trust over the last fifteen years.

Quite rapidly we must create a "business plan" or scheme for the Helensburgh Heritage Centre!

Which subjects / aspects of local life must have priority to be displayed first? And which later?

How will they be shown to the best advantage - for both the serious researcher and casual visitor?

How will the admission of the public be sought and managed?

All contributions, suggestions and ideas on a postcard, please!

Meetings Programme

The programme of public lectures started very well when our Hon. Life Member, Michael Davies returned with a thought provoking session about the Restoration of Castles and other buildings. Why? To as new? As a home? The many difficult decisions were well considered. The October meeting started with a well attended Annual General Meeting - you will have received the Annual Report and with it the pocket future Syllabus. Our thanks go to John Brown who delivered many on foot, saving considerable postage costs. Our Chairman Stewart Noble then concluded his survey of The Vanished Railways of Old Western Dunbartonshire.

On November 30th we will welcome Joyce Steele who is to take as her subject: The Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and their links with the Helensburgh area. Joyce is a local resident and is Curator of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders' Museum within Stirling Castle.

Printed for Posterity

The National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh has recently submitted a formal request that all recent and future copies of your Newsletter be Deposited in the Archive. We are pleased say that, by agreement, we have been able to send a complete set from issue 1 in September 1996 to date. The spare copies file provided most and your Editors computer disgorged some issues - only 4 had to be photocopied!

A second request was for our updated leaflet on The Victoria Halls - we were able to send that - along with those for the Stained Glass Door Panel at the Medical Centre and The St Bride's

KNC Windows at the Library. KNC