

SPRING 2019 NEWSLETTER



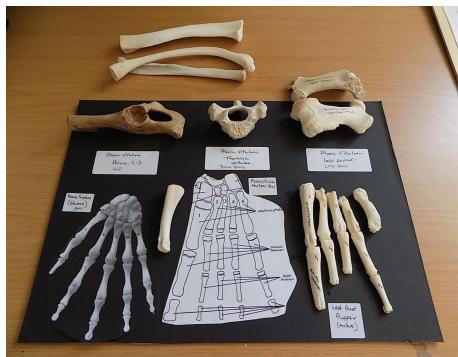
YOUNG CURATORS CLUB

Our new Young Curators Club opened its doors for the first time on Saturday 13th April in the Social Club under the guidance of new Museum Assistant Caroline Seymour (*front right in photo*). The first of the regular weekly sessions started on Wednesday 24th April with nine budding Young Curators attending.

The club is free of charge to the children attending thanks to various grants totalling almost £4,000 from the **Maple Trust, St. Finnbarr's Charity Shop, Co-op, Royal Dornoch Golf Club, the Hugh Fraser Foundation and Pat Munro**, as well as some support from Museum reserves.

The highlight of the first week was a storytelling session on the Selkie folk supported by an exhibition of seal bones and a talk by local expert and volunteer Kate Gilchrist.

The Young Curators have already started discussing creating documentaries on local history events such as the Meikle Ferry disaster and the burning of Janet Horne - watch this space!



MUSEUM UPGRADES

The museum has undergone another transformation over the winter.

Peter Wild has been working hard on our fascinating new temporary exhibition for the 2019 season, based on a significant number of items from the former Bonar Bridge police station loaned to the museum by the family of the late Constable John Jappy.

Outside, thanks to a donation from the Dornoch Geriatric Golfers, we have installed new interpretation panels to support the plough and lampposts installed last year.



MONUMENT RESTORATION PROJECT

Historylinks was recently successful in obtaining a grant from **Museums Galleries Scotland** to help with the restoration of the Memorial Stone to Sheriff Hugh McCulloch which has fallen into disrepair over a number of years.

Sheriff McCulloch was a much loved and greatly respected member of the local community in Dornoch who drowned in the Meikle Ferry Disaster of 1809. He was also a lay preacher who spoke in the open air and the memorial to him, erected by grateful local inhabitants some 100 years later, is sited near where he gave his sermons in fields at Proncy Croy, just outside Dornoch.



The Museum has recently become a working partner with Dornoch Academy and it was decided to undertake the restoration alongside young people from the school's Rural Skills Programme. The work involved is appropriate to their course and it gives both the Museum and the Academy an opportunity to work together on a heritage project.

The project is almost complete, although an extension of time to the end of May has had to be requested from Museums Galleries Scotland because bad weather in January and February prevented outdoor work for several weeks. This has been granted and work should be complete to the new schedule.

LONGHOUSE PROJECT

After many months of work with the Heritage Lottery Fund, Historylinks has been awarded a grant of £15k for a project to look at the way of life of a small settlement at Dalnamain on the Lochbuie Road near Torboll Falls.

The project will start later this year and will explore how people lived before the Clearances. It will investigate the lifestyle and culture of the people who made their living from the land through research, oral history and workshops - allowing as many people as possible to take part.

Research into Sutherland Estates records will tell us about the families who lived in this area and the project will chart the impact the improvements had on the tenants.

Traditional construction skills will be explored so people can experience the difficulties Highlanders had to face in terms of weather conditions, materials and land. Other workshops will allow people to experience cooking, building, smithing, growing, spinning and weaving, as well as investigating the living conditions, farming practices, language and religion of the Highlands.

There will be lots of opportunities for local people of all ages to get involved in the project which, if all goes well, may eventually lead to an excavation of the site.



ANNIVERSARY

Friday 12th July 2019 marks the 20th anniversary of Historylinks opening its doors!

An article in our archives from the Northern Times report of the event shows Chair Ian Ross-Harper

standing in front of one of the panels still on show in the Museum.

The building was designed by Sutherland District Council's architect and cost £186,000, with funding coming from the European Regional Development Fund, the former Sutherland District Council, Dornoch Common Good Fund and Caithness & Sutherland Enterprise as well as a significant input from members and local fund raising. However, the design and equipment of the interior was estimated to cost a further £60,000, which the Heritage Society raised themselves!

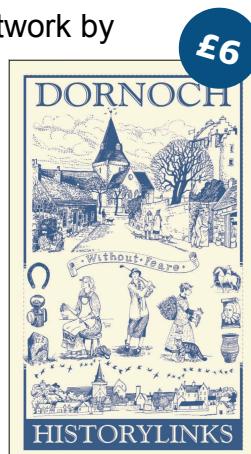
Details of celebrations to mark the event will be announced soon.

TEA TOWELS

Our **NEW** Historylinks tea towels are now available to purchase in the Museum at £6 each.

From stunning artwork by Sally Wild, these limited edition towels feature many local places and items of interest.

They will make an ideal present for anyone with an interest in Dornoch.



FORTHCOMING EVENTS 2019

Saturday 11 th May	Coffee Morning	Dornoch Social Club	10.00 ^{am}
Home baking, preserves, sales tables & refreshments. Also large selection of plants on sale.			

Saturday 11 th & Sunday 12 th May	Open Doors Weekend	Historylinks Museum	10.00 ^{am} - 4:00 ^{pm}
FREE entry to the Museum all weekend as part of our consultation on the plans to purchase the Museum land and build an extension. Come along and see the latest plans and let us know what you think. Your views are important to us and may help us convince the Highland Council to transfer ownership of the land to the charity.			

Friday 12 th July	20th Anniversary Celebrations	Historylinks Museum	tbc
Come along to the Museum and help us celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the Museum opening back in 1999. More information coming soon.			

Friday 13 th December	Films, Mince Pies & Festive Fun	Dornoch Social Club	7.30 ^{pm}
An early note of the date of this year's Festive Fun evening. Unseen films from Historylinks, mysteries and a chance for the audience to reminisce enjoying seasonal refreshments. If you have any films, photographs or stories which may interest local people then please contact Peter Wild.			

BACKGROUND & DESIGN SKETCHES

Background

As already discussed with our members, the Trustees of the charity are committed to moving towards financial sustainability, free from dependence on our reducing revenue grant from Highland Council.

To achieve this goal we recognise a need to create more space in the Museum - something which has been discussed since Historylinks first opened 20 years ago. However, we are reluctant to build an extension with our members funds on land we don't own, and so with the help of the Scottish Land Fund we are aiming to secure title to the existing plot before building any extension.

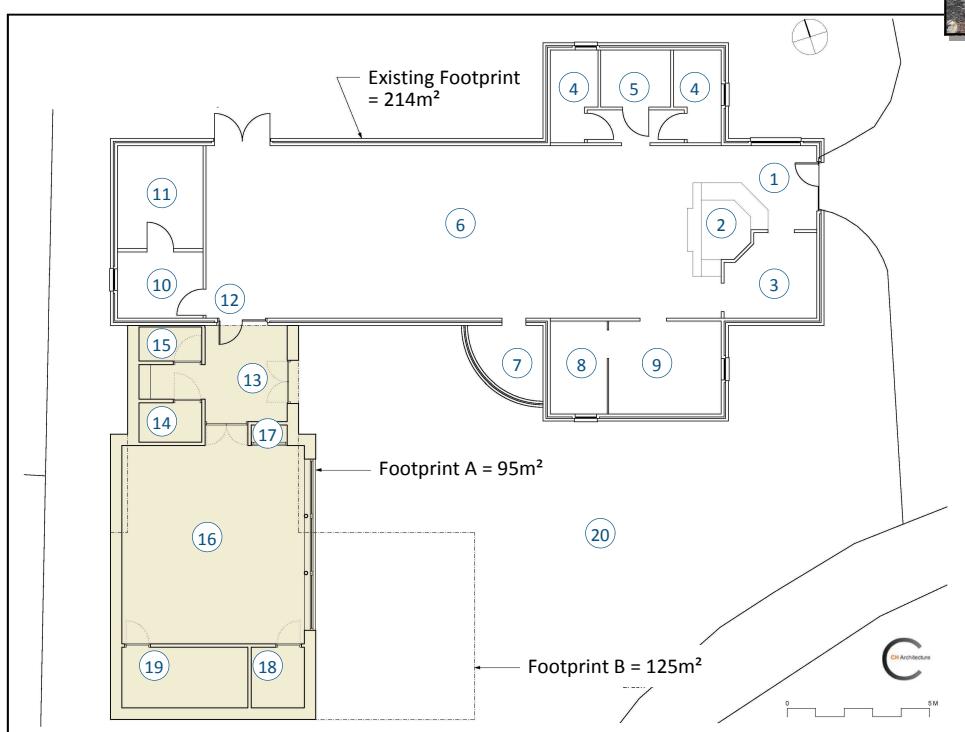
Design Sketches

The following initial designs have been produced by local architect Catriona Hill as part of our Stage 1 project. We welcome your thoughts on both the concept of securing title to the land before building and the idea for an extension itself; including what it may look like and what it could be used for.



The interior sketch shows how the aspect over the garden could create an outward looking space. Track lighting and hanging rails along the two primary walls could accommodate changing exhibitions.

The sketch shows a simple single storey structure connecting via the south wall of the existing building taking advantage of the existing double doors in the external facade.



Please come along to our free 'Open Doors' weekend at Historylinks on Saturday 11th & Sunday 12th May - or contact us at the Museum - to let us know what you think.



EXTENSION PROJECT

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Who owns the Museum?

Unfortunately, this is not an easy question to answer! The Museum land is leased from the **Dornoch Common Good Fund** by the **Dornoch Heritage SCIO** at a fixed rent of just £10 per annum, an agreement which runs until 15th Feb 2095.

The Museum building was paid for and equipped by the former **Dornoch Heritage Society**, with funding coming from a number of different sources, including significant local fund raising.

Although the land is an asset of the Dornoch Common Good Fund, it has been established that, as it was in private ownership up to 1995, it is NOT 'Common Good Land' in the traditional sense.

However, the **Highland Council** will have the final say of the transfer of the land and crucially, under Scots law, title to the building ultimately reverts to them as landowners.

Who runs the Museum?

The Museum is run by a dedicated committee of the **Dornoch Heritage SCIO** - a successful volunteer-led charity with over 200 (mainly local) members - which is registered with, and regulated by, the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR).

We are a fully accredited museum by **Museums Galleries Scotland** (the National Development Body for the Scottish museums sector) and enjoy 5* Museum attraction status from **VisitScotland**.

Why do we need an Extension?

We recognise the need to generate more income to offset the reduction in our annual revenue grant from Highland Council (via Highlife Highland), which has reduced by £6,000 in the past 2 years - representing about 20% of our core income.

We need more space to exhibit more items from our 13,000+ collection - the existing building is overflowing with less than 1,000 items on display.

We have also identified a number of major local artefacts currently housed elsewhere which we would like to exhibit but are unable to owing to lack of space in the Museum.

We have had to turn down offers of travelling exhibitions coming to Historylinks due to lack of space.

We see the extension as presenting an opportunity to do more things, to attract more visitors to generate more income in pursuit of financial independence and sustainability for the charity.

Why do we need to buy the land?

We don't HAVE to buy the land to build an extension, but any extension built on land we don't own will NOT belong to the Museum members or the charity. In light of this, the Trustees are unwilling to proceed with fund raising for an extension without first owning the land.

How will we pay for the land?

We have already received grant support from the **Scottish Land Fund** (SLF) for Stage 1 of our project. Part of this is to obtain a valuation of the land from an independent valuer. Depending on this value, we may return to the SLF for Stage 2 support to help with up to 95% of the cost of purchase.

We are in discussions with the Estates Department of the Highland Council and, again depending on the value of the land, we may seek to purchase via a Community Asset Transfer application. We are also committed to using some of our existing reserves to help acquire title to the land if necessary.

How will this affect the Dornoch Common Good Fund?

It has been determined that any capital sum paid for the land will be automatically added to the Dornoch Common Good Fund, ring-fenced for the purposes of capital expenditure (e.g. similar land purchase or maintenance of existing assets). The Trustees believe that the 'Common Good' will be served better by such a capital injection as opposed to the receipt of just £760 over the next 76 years!

How will we pay for the construction?

We have had discussions with a potential major funder and the Stage 1 project includes the preparation of a feasibility study, options appraisal and business plan to support applications to other funders (e.g. Heritage Lottery Fund, Robertson Trust, etc.).

We also anticipate that an element of crowd-funding will be part of the overall funding mix required.