

APRIL 2021 NEWSLETTER

STOP PRESS!

HISTORYLINKS TO REOPEN ON 26th APRIL

We are delighted to announce that, fingers crossed, Historylinks Museum will reopen to the public (members and visitors) on Monday 26th April.



The plan is to open 7 days a week from 10:30 - 4 pm until the end of October, but this is obviously subject to any changes in Government guidance, which we will follow at all times. However, we will have the same '7 Steps for Safe Visit' rules in place as last year and the Trustees, Staff and Volunteers are all confident that we can offer a safe and enjoyable environment for everyone visiting the Museum.

Although our doors will have been closed for almost 5 months, there has been a lot of work going on behind the scenes which will be evident to visitors in 2021. Read on . . .



Highland Threads

We were delighted to be part of the Highland Threads project over the winter. Fourteen museums in the Highlands collaborated to create an online exhibition of costume. Many Highland Museums were unable to open their doors to the public last year so getting an online presence has been really important. The project was run by Museums and Heritage Highland, funded by Heritage Lottery Fund and facilitated by Expo North.

Each Museum exhibited one piece of costume from their collection. Project Conservator, Rachel Thomas, then visited Historylinks to professionally mount the 18th Century silk brocade dress that we have on loan. The project was able to provide us with a mannequin that we can keep in order to mount other costume displays in the future. Jim Dunn, photographer for the Glasgow Museums, then came to take images and video of the dress.

Online events are taking place in May and podcasts about all of the costumes will be available on the project website. If you haven't already, then please do have a look at the exhibition at:

www.highlandthreads.co.uk

Childhood Exhibition

As the children's room in the museum is out of action due to Covid, we decided to use it as an extra exhibition space, and what better theme than Childhood?

The new display covers childhood in the Dornoch Parish in the 18th, 19th, 20th and 21st Centuries. The research has been done using memoirs of local people and with help from Dr Ebby Ritchie of UHI, who has written articles on childhood in the Highlands.

There are some wonderful artefacts to come and see including a wax doll from around 1830, a tricycle from 1900 and a 1940s dolls pram.

The Museum of Childhood in Strathpeffer have been very helpful in loaning objects to us for our exhibition.



NEW DISPLAYS FOR 2021

Last year long-time volunteer Peter Wild created an new external exhibition in the museum grounds called **'Domestic Life'**, which attracted a lot of attention from passers-by along Meadows Road.

Over the last few months Peter has been adding to the display and the result is a fascinating insight into life in the Dornoch Parish in days gone by, which has now been completed by the installation of a new interpretation panel matching those of the adjacent Plough, Winch and Lampposts.

Inside the museum, we have taken the opportunity over the winter to relocate some objects, allowing them to be better displayed.



Peter has completed a fantastic new display about the SS Athenia which includes a nameplate from one of the lifeboats.

The nameplate was found by David Murray of Dornoch while serving with the Lovat Scouts in the Faroes in 1940.

Wreckage was spotted at the foot of cliffs flanking the south side of Oyndar Fjord, to the north east of the island of Eysturoy, one of the most northerly of the Faroe Islands.

This turned out to be the wreckage of one of the lifeboats from the Athenia, which had been torpedoed on the first day of WW2, killing 112 people.

Finally, Peter has also made new display cabinets for small artefacts from the First and Second World Wars that enhance the war interpretation.

Auditing

To maintain our Accreditation with Museums and Galleries Scotland, Lynne (Curator) and Caroline (Assistant) have been auditing our collection over the winter in advance of the expected reaccreditation process later in the year. This involves checking the condition of every object and document, making sure that it is stored in the right place. Considering that we have over 13,000 items in the collection, coupled with the fact that we could only have one person in the building at a time, this was no small task!

However, thanks to the wonderful way in which our collection is received, monitored and kept, it was apparently a satisfying and rewarding job to work on. This is largely down to volunteer John Barnes who works away behind the scenes to give every object a personal identification number and add it to the database and the **Historylinks Archives**. This allows us to find any particular object within a few minutes. Thank you John!

While going through the store, Lynne found some interesting bits and pieces that she thought people may like to see on display.

There was no connecting thread to the items so a small new exhibition of **'Curator's Curiosities'** has been mounted to give people the opportunity to see some objects from the archives that would not otherwise be displayed.

All these items will be on display in the Museum in 2021.



EXTENSION PROJECT UPDATE

The planning application for the Museum Extension was submitted to Highland Council on 15th December 2020. Unfortunately the initial design did not meet with approval from the planning officer and so following discussions between the planners, our Architect and the extension sub-committee (Jerry Bishop, Peter Wild and Stuart Gardiner), revised designs were worked-up which were submitted (along with additional supporting documents explaining our ideas) on 3rd March.

I am delighted to report we received notice that our planning application was approved on 14th April 2021 - a momentous day!

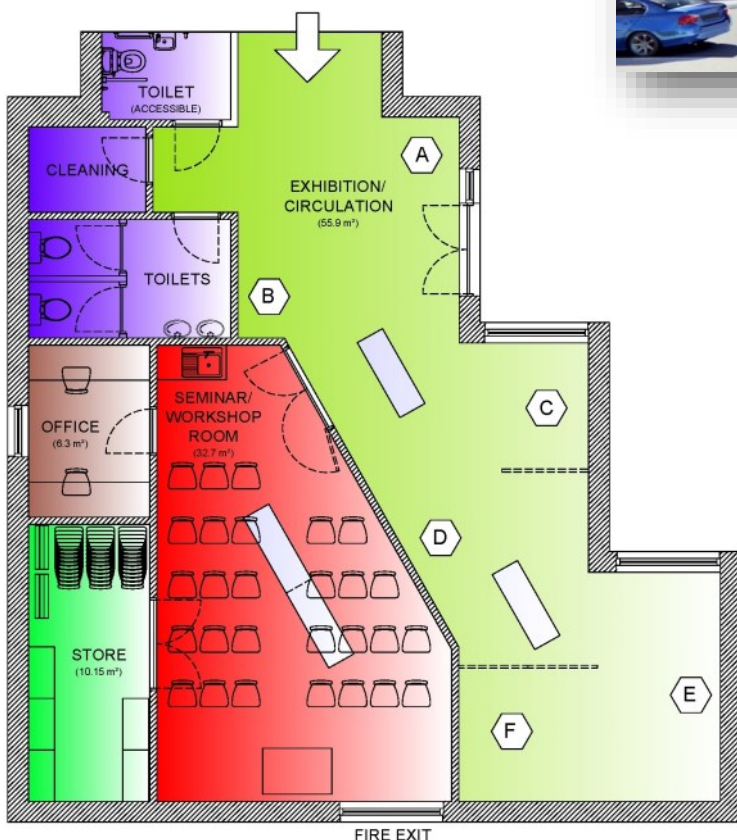
The approved building is for the same footprint and internal layout as previously advised, the differences being a higher roof pitch, an extra window and changes to the external material finishes.

It is fair to say that everyone involved is delighted and relieved to have got over this hurdle, and thanks to the generous grant from the Dornoch Common Good Fund, we are now able to proceed with a Building Warrant application.

This stage of the process defines exactly how the building will be constructed, and includes structural engineers, heating & ventilation, electrical layout, plumbing requirements, window specifications, etc..

The end result of this will be a full bill of materials for the project, which will be used to give us a more accurate estimate of the cost of building the extension.

We are already in discussions with a number of potential funding sources (including the National Lottery Heritage Fund) but we also plan to launch an appeal for funds later in the year - **watch this space!**



CAUSE FOR ALARM

The original intruder alarm was installed in 1998 when the building opened. It is connected via a call-centre to the Police and has sometimes caused false alarms - always in the early hours of the morning on the very coldest nights requiring a volunteer to turn out to meet the Police!!

With this in mind, it was decided to upgrade the system over the winter to the latest, insurance-approved wireless system. At the same time we have created a high-security area for possible new exhibits once the extension is open.

The new system is fully scalable for the extension and the cost of just over £1,000 was picked up on behalf of the Museum by the Heritage Society (i.e. you the members).

THANK YOU!

YOUNG CURATORS CLUB UPDATE by Caroline Seymour



Volunteer Alison Davies has been working with Lynne to secure funding to run The Young Curators Club (YCC) and we were delighted to receive over £1,000 from Tesco Bags of Help and £900 from The Weir Charitable Trust, which will allow the club to continue for another year. Many thanks also go to Lorna Dalton who has again volunteered to help at the club.

Just before lockdown in December the YCC took to the streets of Dornoch to bring some Victorian cheer to the residents of The Meadows Care Home and Oversteps Eventide Home. The youngsters donned Victorian dress and armed with land lamps, bells and carol sheets they sang well known carols from the outside to residents congregated in the lounge areas. They then went to Roderick Court where they once again entertained local residents and people came to their doorways and out onto the street to join in with the singing. A huge thank you goes to Martin Treacher who gave up his time to coach the children in percussion and singing and also lead the music on the night.

The YCC has not been able to meet since last December, but despite this Caroline has been busy organising future activities. The big challenge has been to find things that could be done out of doors. As Lynne was researching the temporary exhibition on childhood for this season, she came across a reference in the memoir of Lorna Currie about 'Digging for Victory'. After chatting to Caroline about it, suddenly, an idea was born!

To link in with the childhood exhibition, Caroline and Lynne came up with the idea of a **YCC vegetable garden**. Highland Seedlings, who run the Fearn Free Food Garden, have donated enough compost and seedlings for 3 raised beds and the YCC members will also be putting together a time capsule about life during COVID and will bury it in the museum grounds. That should keep them busy!

*YCC is for children aged 8 to 12 years old and a couple of the members will be teenagers this coming year. They are very keen to carry on being involved with the museum, so Caroline is working on an idea to allow children from 13 upwards to have a more hands on role with the museum collection. **After all, they are Young Curators too!***

FINANCE & FUNDING

It goes without saying that 2020 was a challenging year (to say the least!) but the Museum finances remain robust thanks to higher than budgeted earned income when we were allowed to open the doors coupled with fantastic support from our members and external grant funders.

In relation to Covid, we received excellent support from the Government from grants totalling £12,960 via the Business Support Scheme and the Job Retention Scheme. Our staff were only furloughed for just over 2 months, the rest of the time we were able to keep them employed on their normal contracts. We also received three grants totalling just over £10,000 from Museum Galleries Scotland (MGS) to; modify our internet system to allow for home working, to allow us to prepare for reopening in July 2020 and to part fund a winter work programme for our two staff members.

As noted above, the YCC received grants from Tesco Bags of Help, the Co-Op Local Community Fund and the Weir Charitable Trust, meaning that its work is fully funded for the next 12 months (and beyond).

We also received two project grants in the year, one from the Dornoch Common Good Fund for Phase 2 of the Extension Project and the other from Heritage Lottery Fund to complete the Longhouse Project.

Finally, a much higher percentage of our admissions in 2020 were donated under the HMRC Gift Aid scheme, increasing the value of half of all our admissions in the year by an extra 25%.



THANKS TO EVERYONE FOR YOUR SUPPORT

