

# Chairman's Open Day Report - 3 June 2017

## Welcome and Introduction

Lord and Lady Thurso, ladies and gentlemen, and children, good afternoon and welcome to Castlehill Heritage Centre. This exhibition and Open day is to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Castletown Heritage Society moving into these premises.

CHS was formed in 1985 as a registered charity to preserve the character, history and traditions of the village of Castletown and the parish of Olig. This year we celebrate ten action packed years since we completed the conversion of some redundant and derelict farm buildings at Castlehill into Castlehill Heritage Centre. The Society acquired these premises in 2004 and following extensive renovation work they were opened to the general public in May 2007. From humble beginnings the Centre has gone from strength to strength.

We set out to be as energy sustainable as possible. We have a bio-mass boiler for hot water and heating, solar panels for electricity generation and a rainwater recycling system for flushing the toilets (and watering the garden!).

We achieved a 3 Star quality grading from Visit Scotland in 2014 and we are proud of the fact that despite Castlehill being run by only a small number of volunteers we are one of the few visitor attractions in Caithness that is open all year round.

The running order for today's event is:

- Hugh Crowden – has been with us since 2006 and was extensively involved on the renovation of the buildings and construction of the garden.
- Muriel Murray – has been involved with the Society from the 1990s & will cover the early development and activities of Castlehill.
- Lord Thurso – formal opening
- Exhibitions, displays and refreshments shortly – no charge, but we are a charity and any donations will be gratefully received!

## Where We Are Now - Headlines

**Visitors:** Normally we have around 1500 visitors per year. As well as local people and visitors from all over the UK, we usually have a good number of international visitors from a wide range of countries. Examples from the last 3 years are USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, most of the European countries, Scandinavia,

Iceland, Argentina, Brazil, Mauritius, South Africa, China, Hong Kong, Japan, Inner Mongolia, India, Russia and Jamaica.

We also host group visits from local organisations, for example, Couthie Corner, Boy's Brigade, Thurso Guides and SWRIs.

**Exhibitions:** We aim for 3 different exhibitions each year:

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

Examples of other exhibitions from recent years are:

**Life at Home** - illustrating everyday life at home in by-gone times;

**Hatches, Matches and Despatches** - self explanatory!

**Crofting and Farming;**

**Communications Through the Ages;**

**Education;**

**Formidable females** - outstanding women from this locality

**Maritime History** - this exhibition continues in the archaeological room.

The **Rolls-Royce V12 Merlin engine:** Continues to be a very popular exhibit.

**Heritage Garden:** Is much admired and commented on by our visitors, especially during the summer months. This of course is thanks to the continuous efforts of Irene Wares and her 'green fingers' and hard work.

**Traditional Craft & Skills Workshops:**

Over the years we have organised and run a large number of different workshops, examples of which are on display in the photographs. Two recent very successful workshops were Caithness chair making skills and making ceramic buttons.

**Other Activities:** Over the 10 years we held a great number of different activities including:

- Winter Evening Talks;
- Bothy Nights;
- August Sunday Cream Teas;
- Wedding;
- Wild North Festival – with Bumble Bee Conservation Trust and Plantlife;
- Food Fayres;
- Craft Fayres;

- Science and Engineering Family days;
- Global 'spinnathon' – we, together with Ann Johnson from the local spinning group, organised and ran live hook-up contacts with spinning groups in each of the seven continents – a world first, I believe!
- Archaeology Projects– Viking & Norse Heritage + Bronze Age Caithness;
- Archaeology Reference Library - a large collection of archaeology books bequeathed to us by Paul Humphreys, a long time supporter of ours;

**Outreach:** Muriel gives talks to local organisations and schools, on request. We also play an active role in encouraging tourism in the area - members of the committee attend regular meetings of Venture North and CASVAG (Caithness And Sutherland Visitor Attraction Group).

One of the most rewarding things we do at Castlehill is help visitors searching for their ancestors to find as much as possible about them through our documents, maps, photograph collection and our growing knowledge of local family history. Most of the communication is by email but sometimes in person. This year we have had individuals coming to us from Australia, Canada, and New Zealand.

**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.
- Sea Theme Workshop – Sat 26 August 2017: Will cover various activities related to the sea e.g.s. rope making, driftwood sculpture, fish smoking, net making, cooking etc. Supporting us will be Seadrift, RSPB, Brough Bay Association, and the Wick Rowers with the activities being spread around Dunnett Bay
- Foraging Workshop – 10 September 2017.
- Glass Craft workshop.
- The traditional Sunday cream teas in August.
- Demonstration open day by the wood turners.
- Caithness Astronomy Group public events.
- Scottish Ornithologists' Club public evenings.
- During the winter months we will be planning another series of interesting and informative talks.
- Archaeology Project: As our contribution to the Scottish Government's 2017 Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology, CHS has chosen to investigate some of the archaeological sites within

Olig parish. Initial research has found a total of 40 locations and we intend to focus on six varied sites. Participation by children and young people will be a central objective.

- The acquisition of a Stroma yawl from Wick Heritage Society.

**Other Users:** We particularly appreciate the presence of our fellow users of Castlehill, namely, Dunnett Forest Trust, the North Highland Woodturners Association, Mary Anns Cottage, and AOC Archaeology. We also have very close working associations with Brough Bay Association, Caithness Astronomy Group, Scottish Ornithologists Club, the radio hams and the local spinning group. Some of these groups have set-up their own displays for you to enjoy.

**Finally:** That's enough from me. I would now like to hand over to Hugh Crowden and Muriel Murray to outline some of the challenges faced and overcome to reach our current successful position.

Following Hugh and Muriel, I will then ask Lord Thurso to formally open the exhibition and Open Day and to cut the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary cake, baked by Elspet Chapman, one of our committee members.