

Curator's Report 10 Sept 2025

Most of my time was spent on the HES Small Grants application for the Roundhouse project.

Display development

Addition to Bard's display: Stuart Letford (piping tutor, part of group who erected Iain Dall Mackay's cairn in Flowerdale; worked with Roy Wentworth) has agreed to contribute a recording of his own playing of one of Iain Dall Mackay's (The Blind Piper) piping songs to add to the Bard's listening post (we discussed Coriennessan's Lament). Cost for Craig to make updates: £150.

Parallel to this, we had a suggestion of borrowing the Iain Dall chanter from NMS (Anna's research below, thanks to Allan for sharing). This would be a long-term project, requiring courier transport, security and environmental conditions to be met as part of the loan agreement. There may be option of philanthropic donations around this as indicated by the enquirer. Together, this would be a highly attractive development proposal for our displays, further strengthened by the research Anna did as part of her work for NMS, expanding on the text below, which she will share with us.

Feadan Iain Doill / Iain Dall's chanter



There is perhaps no more iconic 'Gaelic' instrument than the Highland bagpipe. This chanter – the part of the bagpipe with finger holes, which creates melody – is one of the oldest ones known. It belonged to Iain MacKay, or Am Piobaire Dall, the blind piper, who lived from around 1656 to around 1754. He can be considered part of the aos-dàna, a select group of learned artists revered in Gaelic society. They operated at the highest level of skill and ability. His piobaireachd (pibroch) compositions are renowned for their complexity and beauty. He was also an important poet.

Before it was donated to National Museums Scotland, the chanter was cared for by eight generations of Am Piopaire Dall's family in Canada, having travelled there with his grandson in 1805. Research into the making of the chanter has attempted to recreate how it

might have sounded when originally played. This object connects to the sound of the past, and the role of music in Gaelic society. His legacy continues today with pipers still playing his compositions, his reputation never having waned.

Further display development:

Work with Pixel Stag to add touch-screen kiosk interactive display commencing this month.

Enquiry from Louise Taylor re a small school exhibition curated by pupils.

Grants

ESGA application for continuation of Whatever the Weather Wednesdays submitted.

Grant reporting completed for Gaelic Conversation Group BnG grant.

HES Small Grants application submitted – many thanks to Pauline and Ben for their edits and input.

Collections

Conversation with Heckie Buie and John Mackenzie about thatching to add further information to our archive.

Acquisition proposal (appended) – board decision needed.

Documentation

Sofie completed the Accessions backlog, adding object descriptions and photographs to Axiell.

Other

Partnership visit to Sabhal Mor Ostaig confirmed for 19 September to visit the archive, meet relevant staff and sign the updated MoU. Sofie to join.

Nomination of Jeremy Fenton for Dorothy Marshal Medal for significant contribution to Scottish Archaeology, put forward by Tom Gardner and myself.

Tom Gardner has proposed formalising our archaeology digs as a small-scale, multi-year project delivered over three years, with an additional year for post-excavation reporting. He recommends submitting a £60,000 application to NHL to cover capital costs for a museum display, interpretation, open-access publication, and the production of post-excavation reports (to be undertaken by Tom). As before, Tom will provide his excavation time in-kind and will assist with the funding bid. I am seeking Board approval to allocate staff time to prepare the application and to commit, in principle, to this programme subject to funding.

Roundhouse – progress update

We met with Aultbea and Gairloch Community Councils, as well as submitted a draft of the Design Statement to the other CCs which we have not heard back from. Aultbea CC have endorsed the project and intend to comment positively at Planning; conversations with Gairloch CC are ongoing regarding site location and their suggested alternatives. A note in the G&DT highlighted GCC's alternative site proposals. Following GCC's suggestion to position the roundhouse behind the Museum, ARC prepared a site assessment that concludes this location is neither practical nor desirable; the assessment has been sent to GCC.

The museum's Planning Group which supports the Roundhouse planning application has been very effective – thanks to all members for their contributions. The planning application is being submitted imminently.

We have asked all our supporters/stakeholders/community members for letters of support for the planning application and received many favourable responses. The Museum Board has contributed their own support letter for our planning application – thanks to Pauline for pulling together.

Funding-wise, we have submitted a HES Small Grants application for just under £100,000, with a Community Regeneration Fund application to follow next week.

On engagement and learning, the SMART group from Gairloch High School has signed up for four sessions linked to the roundhouse, to be supported by Sarah and Jeremy. We held a community consultation day and gathered further feedback.