

Welcome

Fàilte



Souvenir guidebook



OUR LAND, OUR PEOPLE, OUR STORY

From.....



The original Gairloch Heritage Museum was opened in 1977 in the former steading of Achtercairn Farm. Our Gaelic name is *Taigh-tasgaidh Gheàrrloch*. *Taigh* means 'house' and *tasgaidh* means 'store' or 'treasure'. So, the Museum is a house in which Gairloch's treasures are stored.



The origins of the collection were the objects, photographs, letters and all manner of other items which told the stories of Gairloch parish, brought along by local enthusiasts to talks and meetings held in the early 1970s. When an inscribed Pictish stone was found close by, the only one known at the time on the west coast mainland, it became a key exhibit. The salmon symbol from the Stone has been our logo, in various representations, ever since.

The number and size of our artefacts grew with the rescue of fittings from local schools and the shop at Melvaig, the open air pulpit from Shildaig and the lens and foghorn which were decommissioned from the lighthouse at Rubh Re. As the collection grew, so also grew the challenges of extending the accommodation to display and interpret the exhibits and to offer the facilities expected of a 21st century heritage attraction, library and archive.

OUR LAND, OUR PEOPLE, OUR STORY

.....To



By 2011, it had become critical that the Museum secure its future by finding a new 'home'. The way forward proved to be the old Council Roads Depot. This had once been an Anti-aircraft Operations Room (AAOR), built in the early 1950s to coordinate the response to the expected attacks from Russian bombers at the start of the 'Cold War'. With its nuclear-bomb-proof construction, ideal location on the main road with views to Skye and space to develop as a heritage and learning centre, the Museum volunteers saw the potential in what had been an uncared-for eyesore. After a successful large-scale fund-raising campaign and a substantial conversion project, the new Gairloch Museum opened for visitors and the community in July 2019.

We can now welcome you to our exciting new galleries and displays, to our research facilities and to our café and shop. We invite you to come again and again, to enjoy our events and activities and to support our work further by joining as a member. Winter and summer, there is always something new to see and do, as you explore 'Our land, our people, our story'.





The Rubh Re lighthouse, on the cliffs overlooking the Minch, was designed by David A Stevenson, whose family is well known for their many lighthouse constructions. Local men from Melvaig, the nearest township, helped to build both the lighthouse and jetty and the lamp was lit for the first time on 15 January 1912. There are several different gaelic spellings for the 'smooth headland', one of which is *A' Rubha Réidh*.



The impressive Fresnel lens on display in the atrium is one of the largest ever built by Chance Brothers in their factory near Birmingham. The lens rotated every 30 seconds, driven by a weighted clockwork mechanism that had to be wound up, day and night. Every lighthouse has its individual sequence of flashes; at Rubh Re it is six rapid flashes, then fifteen seconds of darkness.

When automation came in 1986, a local resident ensured that the lens, lamp and mechanism were salvaged, along with other objects. Amongst these were the original visitors' book and the fog horn, which is now outside in the Museum grounds. The foghorn's four blasts every ninety seconds could be heard up to ten miles away.



Rubh Re was a mainland lighthouse, staffed by three keepers who lived with their families in adjoining houses. A keeper's most important duty was to ensure that the small paraffin lamp never went out as it was this which, magnified by the glass prisms of the lens, created the powerful beam. Should he fail, he would be dismissed instantly. Other tasks included taking weather readings, keeping watch and whitewashing the buildings.

It was a lonely life for the lighthouse families, particularly before the four-mile-long road from the croft houses at Melvaig was built in the 1950s. Until then, all stores had to come in by sea. A winch pulled the goods from the jetty to the top of the hill on a rail.



Once the lighthouse was automated, there was no need for permanent staffing. The Northern Lighthouse Board is still responsible for the tower where the light continues to guide shipping on its way.

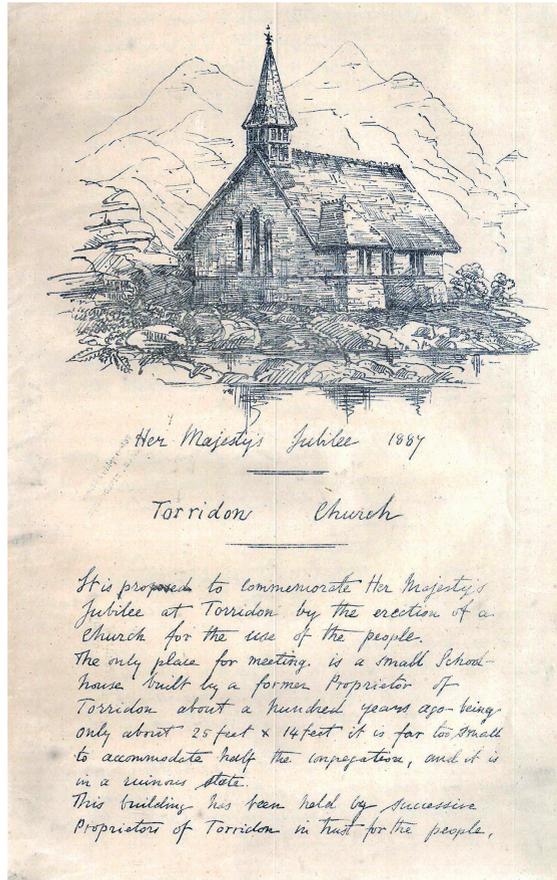




When the old Corry Church in Torridon was being converted into a private house in 2015, a time capsule was found in the porch wall. The letter inside explained that it had been hidden when the church was being built in 1887, the year of Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee.

Building the church had been a community effort, with local people giving their labour and skills if they could not donate money. Remarkably, it only took six weeks from the laying of the foundation stone to the church opening.

Among the contents of the capsule were a church pamphlet, Jubilee issue coins and some contemporary newspapers which provide a glimpse into late Victorian life in a small Highland community. One of the papers was *The Gladiator*, written in the village and full of witty sketches, often of local characters and events.



The Corry Church was built to hold services of the Free Church of Scotland. Unusually for the time, the church pamphlet states that the building could be used to hold 'any Protestant Service'.



The open air pulpit was used for outdoor services across the Highlands. In the early 19th century it was usual for there to be only one communion service every three years or so.

People used to travel from far and wide, on foot and by boat, to spend several days listening to preachers and holding services. Hundreds, maybe thousands, would attend, as is shown by the crowd at the *Leabaidh na Bà Baine*, 'the bed of the white cow', an impressive natural amphitheatre which is now part of Gairloch Golf Course.



The pulpit in the Museum is from Shildaig, Loch Torridon. It originally had a covered top for the outdoor services, and sheltered the Minister, the leather Bible and the Precentor, who led the singing of the psalms. Just like flatpack furniture, it can be dismantled for transport and storage. It was used from the formation of the Free Presbyterian Church there in 1893 until a permanent church was built for the worshippers in 1920.



A GAELIC HERITAGE

Gaelic in Gairloch parish (*Gaidhlig Gheàrrloch*)



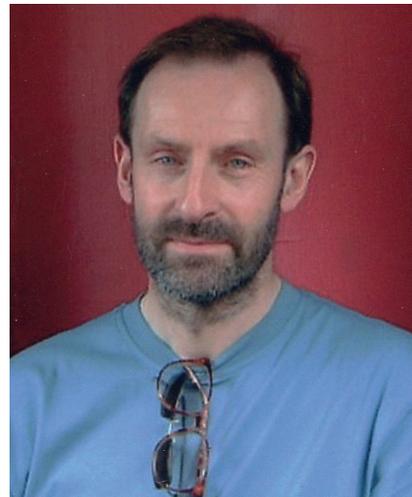
Until the later 1800s, few people in Gairloch parish spoke English, Gaelic being the first language. Even into the 1950s, some still spoke only Gaelic. Although Gaelic is never likely to be heard as freely as it once was, a new generation of children is being taught in Gaelic from nursery school level. This should ensure that Gaelic remains part of the fabric of the local community.



Kay Matheson (1928-2013) was born and lived in Inverasdale, a township on the south side of Loch Ewe. She is best known as one of the four students who secretly removed the Stone of Destiny from Westminster Abbey in 1950 and brought it back to Scotland. Kay was a champion of the Gaelic language at a time when it was being neglected. She recorded and wrote down the stories and songs she heard locally. Her invaluable personal archive is now in the collection of Gairloch Museum.

The Museum's first Curator, Roy Wentworth (1946-2003), taught himself the distinctive local Gaelic dialect when he came to live in Gairloch. He recorded oral histories in the vernacular Gaelic, including the work of the village poets and the memories of Gaelic speakers, collected the local Gaelic place-names and compiled a comprehensive dictionary entitled 'Gaelic Words and Phrases from Wester Ross'.

Thanks to Roy and Kay, the rich cultural heritage of literature, music, oral tradition and place-names survives here.



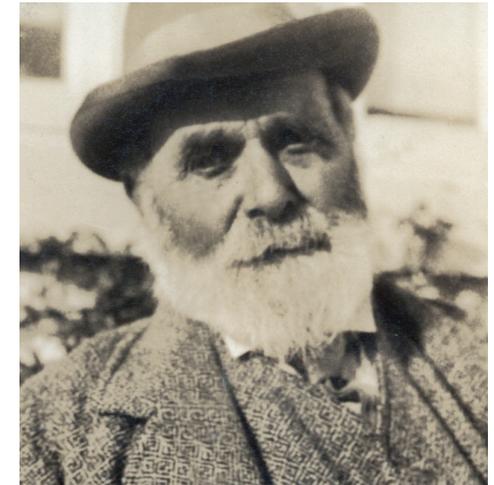
A GAELIC HERITAGE

Gaelic bards



Many talented bards came from the Gairloch area. William Ross (1762-1790) was a schoolmaster. He is best known as a love poet, though he also composed poems praising nature and even whisky. He died young, of tuberculosis, and is buried in Gairloch old cemetery.

John Mackenzie (1806-1848) was a scholar of Gaelic language and literature. He produced a book of William Ross's poems, but is most renowned for publishing 'The Beauties of Gaelic Poetry' (*Sàr-obair nam Bàrd Gàidhealach*), containing biographies of the major Gaelic poets.



Local village poets (*bàrdan-baile*) composed verse on themes ranging from politics to love, often for the social gatherings or *cèilidhs* held in people's homes. The songs, stories and poems were often gently humorous and characterised by a rich, local vocabulary and a love of their homeland (*dùthaich*) and heritage (*dualchas*). One such was Alexander Cameron (1848-1935) known as the Tournai Bard, (above), who spent his whole life on the shores of Loch Ewe.



A cairn was erected in his memory at Inverewe in 1952, praising his Gaelic poems and songs which "earned for him a wide and an honoured reputation throughout the North."

EARLY PEOPLE

Achtercairn archaeology trail



The remains of nearly 200 roundhouses from the Bronze and Iron Ages have been found within 20 miles of Gairloch. These houses had stone walls and probably a conical thatched roof. A hearth fire burnt in the centre, and there was space for a large extended family. The people were farmers, and many of the field walls they built can still be seen.



Ten stone circles have been found above the Museum. Eight of them were roundhouses, two of which have been dated to 726 BC and 477 BC; one was a very large ceremonial centre from 254 BC, another a Neolithic work area from 2769 BC.

Also to be seen here are a burial site, a small ritual site, many signs of early farming, later shieling huts and a very fine 19th century sheep enclosure. From just behind the Museum a self-guided two-mile archaeological trail takes you round these sites, offering spectacular views and a delightful walk through varied scenery.

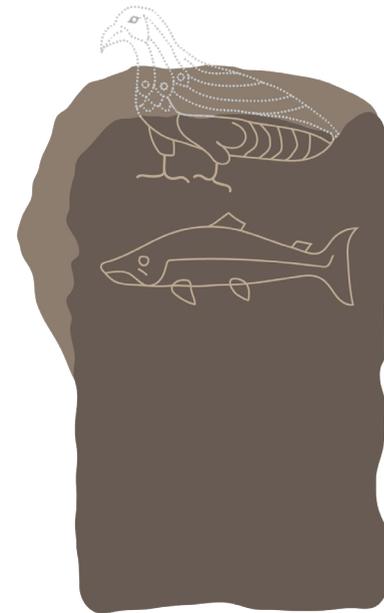


EARLY PEOPLE

Pictish stone



The Picts lived mainly in northern and eastern Scotland during the late Iron Age and early Medieval periods. They left behind unusual artworks and symbol stones covered in mysterious designs. Hundreds of Pictish symbol stones have been found in eastern Scotland, but only two have ever been found on the west coast mainland. The first one is now here in the Museum, the second was found, partially buried in the ground, in the Londubh Burial Ground, Poolewe, in 1992.



The Gairloch Pictish Stone is made of local Torridonian sandstone and was probably carved between AD 500 and 700. It was found around 1870. At different times it had been used as a doorstep at Flowerdale House and as part of the local graveyard wall, before coming to the Museum for safe-keeping.

There has been much debate as to the meaning of the animal depictions on Pictish stones. The current thinking is that the pairs of symbols represent the names and commemorate the deaths of important Picts. The eagle above a salmon on this stone possibly signifies 'in memory of Dunodnat, son of Nechtan'.

EARLY PEOPLE

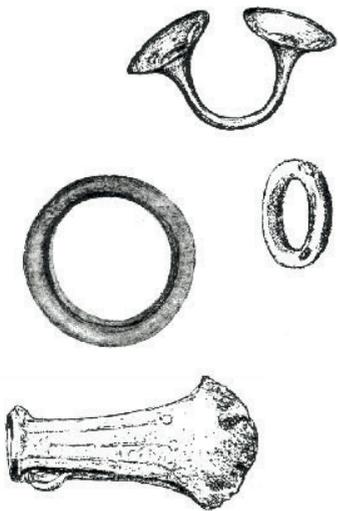
Bronze Age grave goods and the Poolewe hoard



During the Bronze Age, people were sometimes buried in 'cists'. These short, rectangular pits were lined with stones and covered with stone slabs. The bodies were laid on their sides with arms and legs drawn up, as if asleep. Several such cists have been found in the Gairloch area. Two contained distinctive Beaker pottery rarely found in north-west Scotland, which probably dates to the Early Bronze Age (2,200-2,000 BC). They were to help the dead on their journey to the afterlife, so were filled with food or drink.



In the late 19th century, a group of Bronze Age axeheads and rings was found by a local crofter, Hector Maciver, when he was digging his peats on high ground above Poolewe. The hoard was, perhaps, an offering to the gods by a person of wealth and stature. When Hector handed over his find to the landowner, Sir Kenneth Mackenzie of Gairloch, he retained a bronze ring for himself and its whereabouts are now unknown. The remaining objects in the Poolewe Hoard were on display at National Museums Scotland for some years, before returning to Gairloch.



OUR LAND, OUR PEOPLE

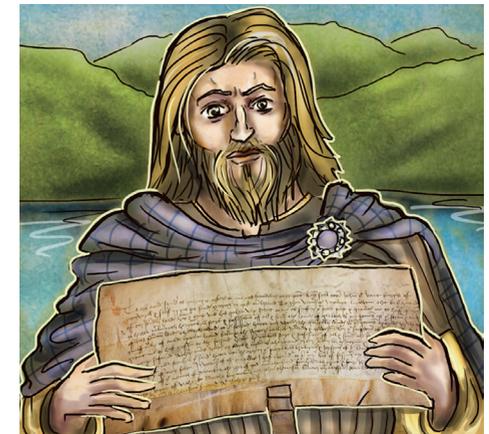
Gairloch of the Mackenzies



Following years of warfare, with different clans fighting for control, King James IV granted the lands of Gairloch to Clan Mackenzie in 1494. However, conflict between the Mackenzies and their chief rivals, the Macleods, continued well into the 1500s. The Mackenzie crest is the *Caberfeidh* or stag's head.



The first laird, or landowner, of the Estate was Hector Roy Mackenzie. Said to have been a giant of a man and a fearless and brave warrior, he settled down to build a house at Flowerdale in Gairloch, which was replaced by the current building in 1738. Mackenzies still live at Flowerdale because, unusually, the Estate has been in the same family for over 500 years.



King James IV granted Hector Roy the lands of Gairloch in a charter dated 1494. They have been in Mackenzie hands ever since.



This handmade figure in 17th century Highland dress wears the great kilt of Mackenzie weathered tartan. The muted colours of a weathered tartan make it appear well worn, as if it had been protecting the wearer from the elements.

OUR LAND, OUR PEOPLE

Too little land, too many people



Life was always hard for the crofters who scraped a living by keeping cattle, growing potatoes and fishing. When the population of Gairloch parish trebled between 1800 and 1830, plots of land were divided up, becoming so small that people could barely subsist. Land was rented on a yearly basis, so the tenants could be evicted quickly. At this time, some landlords began clearing tenants from good arable land to create the sheep farms which were supposed to be more profitable.



Many highlanders faced starvation when potato blight ruined the crop in 1846. Some landlords did support their tenants. Dr John Mackenzie, the factor for the Gairloch Estate, succeeded in securing funds from the Destitution Board to pay for the building of the road along Loch Maree. The tenants became labourers in return for payment in meal (oats or flour). Such 'destitution roads' were constructed throughout the parish and beyond, which greatly improved road communications. At the same time, Lady Mary Mackenzie ensured that local women were taught to spin wool and knit stockings to earn some money.

OUR LAND, OUR PEOPLE

Creating crofting communities



The Mackenzie lairds of Gairloch believed that both landlords and tenants could benefit from agricultural reform without emigration or eviction. In the 1840s, they began restructuring their Estate to create new crofting townships. Tenants were given an individual croft of 2-5 acres, just large enough to support a family, with access to the common grazing land. Settlements such as Bualnaluib, near Aultbea, still keep the layout seen in the detailed mapping of 1845, when the reorganisation of the croft areas began. Every new township on the Gairloch estate was mapped by the surveyor George Campbell Smith.

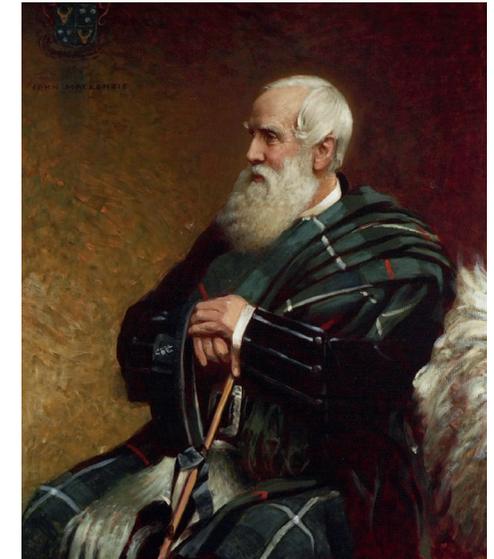


Image courtesy of www.ambaile.co.uk



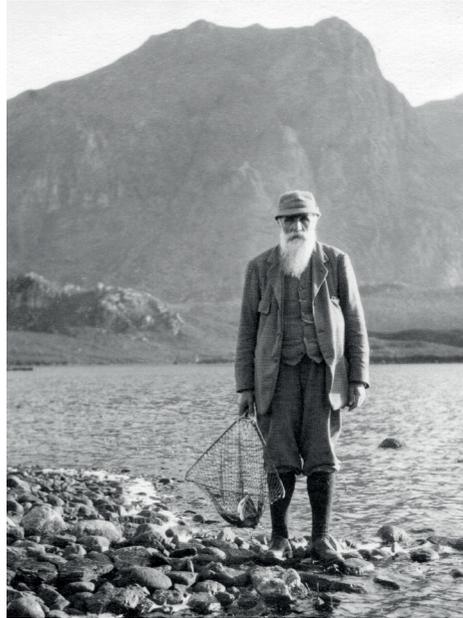
Dr John Mackenzie was the factor for the Gairloch Estate from 1843-1856. He was keen to encourage different ways of farming. From his model farm on Isle Ewe, he encouraged crofters to use new methods such as rotating their crops and growing turnips to feed animals in the winter. Given that most tenants clung to the traditional methods, his reforms were not very popular.

OUR LAND, OUR PEOPLE

Leisure in the landscape



Leisure activities had become a new source of income for both landowners and local people by the mid-1800s as the Gairloch area became accessible by railway and steamer. The rich came to hunt deer and grouse, enjoying the rugged and mountainous landscape. They hired local men as ghillies and stalkers (fishing and hunting guides). Alec and Donald, two generations of the Urquhart family of Poolewe, were keepers on local estates. After a 'happy day in the hills' in 1947, when he bagged a thirteen-pointer stag, Colonel Whitbread, owner of the Letterewe Estate, presented Alec with an inscribed silver hip flask.



Hotels for the tourists were built in Gairloch and beside Loch Maree. Queen Victoria came to stay at the Loch Maree Hotel in September 1877 and, according to the *Glasgow Herald*, she was "most liberal in her praise of some of the localities". Her visit was commemorated by a stone which still sits outside the hotel.



In 1883, the S.S. Mabel was bought by Mr Hornsby, manager of both hotels, to operate pleasure cruises on Loch Maree. The model was made by Dixie Dean.

A WALK THROUGH TIME

Milling



A saddle quern was the earliest way of grinding corn by hand to produce meal or flour. This was replaced by the rotary quern which was more efficient and adaptable. Horizontal water or 'clack' mills (because of the sound they made) were developed once people discovered how the power of water could be used. Milling then became a community affair, with each family coming to the mill to grind their own corn. In time, the vertical water wheel transformed milling from a domestic task to a professional skill. The hand-made Museum models made by Donald Macintyre demonstrate each of these processes.

Records show that there was a mill at Strath, in Gairloch village, from 1638. The Forbes family was the last to work there, from 1870 until it closed in 1922. The watermill painting by Arthur Perigal dates to 1870.

A pair of grinding stones inside the mill produced meal or flour from corn, peas or barley. There was also the kiln, the drying floor, heated by a large fireplace below. With its door onto the main road and the warmth from the kiln, the mill was a great place for people to gather in the evening for a story or song.



During the potato famine of the late 1840s, many women in Gairloch parish supported their families by knitting. Lady Mackenzie employed a skilled knitter from Skye to teach them to make the fancy stockings that were worn with kilts or plus fours. Quality Gairloch stockings were sold in Edinburgh and London and the knitters were praised for producing the best coloured yarns and the finest shaped stockings. A double-diamond design, known as the Gairloch Pattern, was especially popular. It was applied to waistcoats and other garments, as well as stockings. Sometimes there was a pattern within the diamond, such as a stag's head or a cross.



Image courtesy of Alex Gray Muir

Although in most of Britain the wool industry had become mechanized by the 1850s, wool was still being shorn, spun and knitted by hand in the Highlands. Using various plants (such as ragwort), fungi and lichens, wool could be dyed an extraordinary range of colours. Some types of lichen were soaked in stale urine to draw out the colour and the liquid was then used to dye the wool.

Knitting patterns for the Gairloch design are available to purchase.



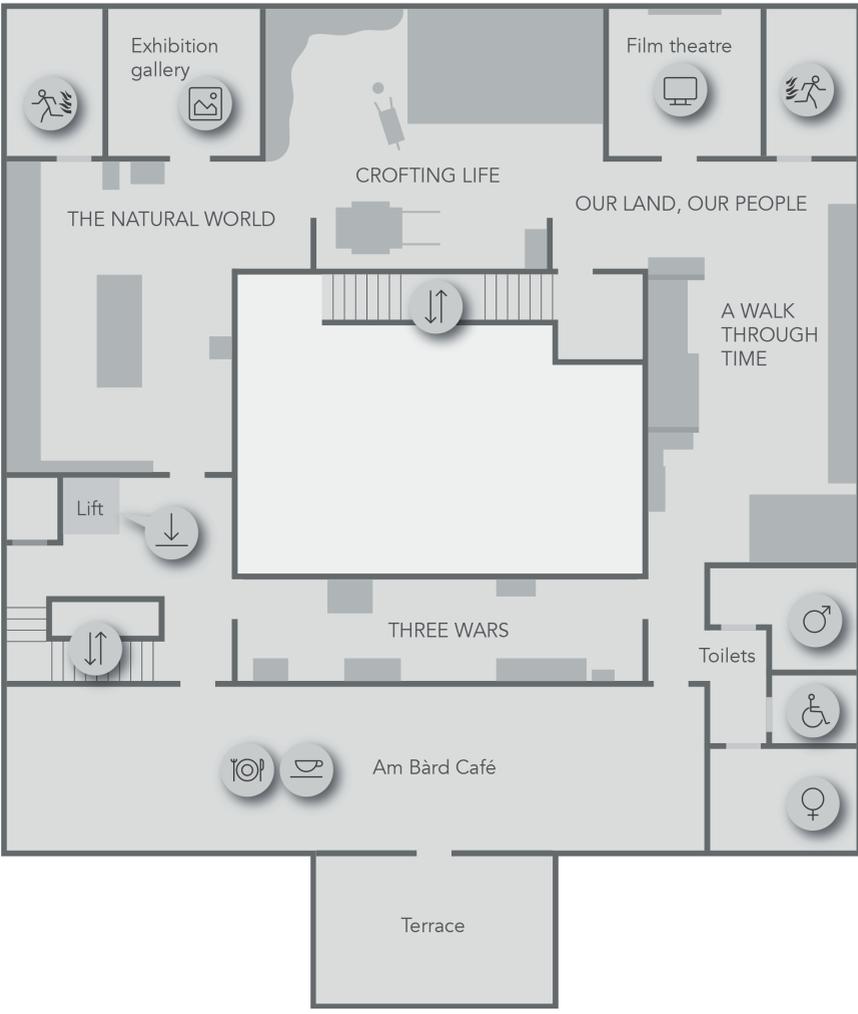
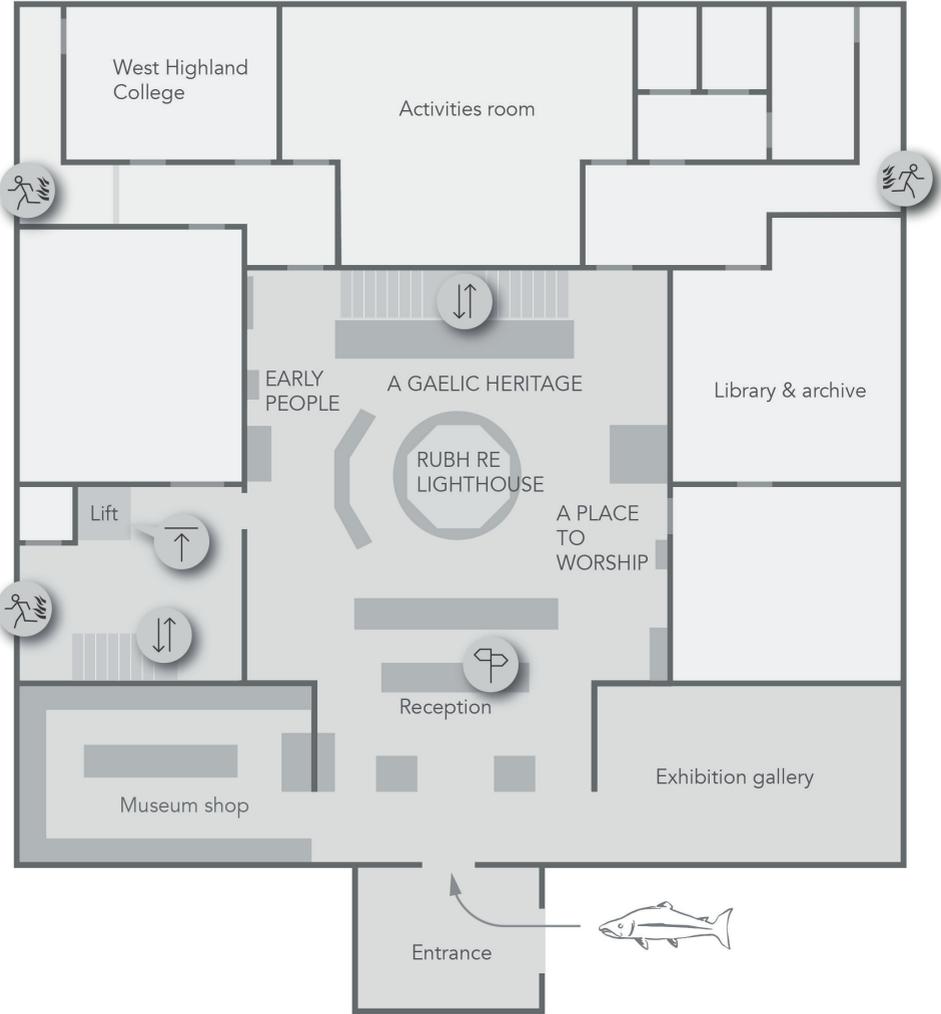
Coming from the Gaelic *uisge-beatha*, the word whisky means 'water of life'. Throughout the Highlands in the 18th and early 19th centuries, crofters would try to avoid the taxes imposed on malt and on the spirit itself by running illicit stills in out-of-the-way places, maybe in caves or under rocky outcrops, where they hoped to escape notice.

For a time, there was a reward of £5 for anyone who revealed the location of an illicit still to the exciseman. It was not unknown for those involved in whisky production to report an old, worn still of their own, collect the reward and use it to buy newer and better equipment!



Ground floor

First floor





The shop counter has been reconstructed from the store of Farquhar Macrae of Melvaig which closed in the 1950s. All the items on display are original and from the Gairloch area. People could buy sweets, tobacco, underwear, farm tools ... in fact, 'everything from a needle to an anchor'. Many goods came by steamer via Kyle of Lochalsh.

Shopkeepers often had to wait for customer accounts to be settled until the money came in from fishing or the sale of livestock.

Until the recent improvements in roads and now supermarket deliveries, there were many more shops in each village, likely to include general stores, ironmonger and blacksmith. Hand-operated petrol pumps were installed outside some local shops once cars began to arrive.



Running the mail

Until the road along Loch Maree was built in the 1840s, post was brought to Gairloch on foot from Dingwall, a round trip of 120 miles through the remote and wild landscape. The post-runner carried a sheepskin knapsack containing the mail for the Gairloch area and for Stornoway too, as the packet steamer left from Poolewe, which is where the first post office opened in 1827. Once there was a road, the mail was brought over by horse and cart.

A post office opened at Flowerdale, Gairloch, in 1853 and by the early 1900s most townships had their own. From posting parcels of eggs to family in the city to receiving urgent messages by telegram, (often sad news), the post office provided a vital service for these remote communities.



Before the First World War there were many more schools in the parish than there are today. Even so, pupils might have to walk a few miles to reach the nearest one. The poorer children went barefoot, summer and winter.



Often there was only one teacher, who taught everyone from the age of 5 to 13 in the same classroom. The school day usually started and ended with a prayer and a psalm.

Standard subjects such as English and Arithmetic were taught, and some schools offered a broader range, which might include Anatomy, Algebra, Navigation or Gaelic. Temperance was also often on the curriculum, with children urged to avoid the perils of the demon drink.

School logbooks report that children were frequently kept at home to help to dig the peats or gather potatoes. Parents also took children out of school when potentially deadly illness such as measles or influenza were going round.



THREE WARS

World War I



When the call went out on 5 August 1914, many from Gairloch parish immediately volunteered to fight for King and Country. The Seaforth Highlanders recruited strongly from Gairloch and Poolewe. The Lovat Scouts was often the preference for men from Laide and nearby, with the navy, Royal or Merchant, being a natural destination for local seafarers.

Seaforth Highlander Johnny 'Scotty' of Kinlochewe was awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for rescuing the seriously injured Heckie Macintyre of Strath, Gairloch, while under heavy enemy fire at Neuve Chapelle, on the Western Front, in March 1915. Johnny's brother, Hector, was killed in action in that same battle. By November 1918, nearly 500 men and women had served and 119 are known to have died.

Research undertaken during the centenary of that conflict has created a resource of local artefacts, photographs, letters and newspaper reports which is available via the Museum website.

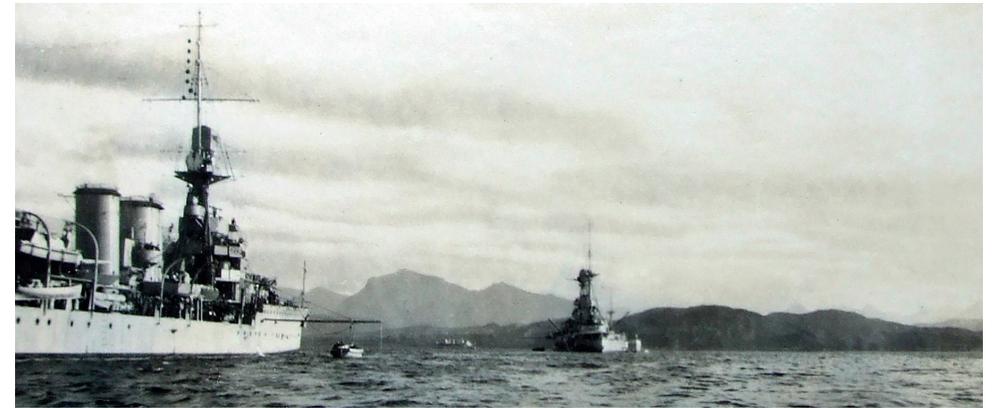


THREE WARS

The Navy and Loch Ewe

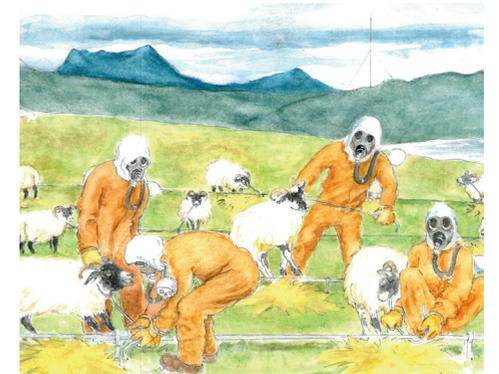


The Royal Navy made good use of Loch Ewe in both World Wars as its deep water and narrow entrance made it easy to defend. Admiral Jellicoe brought his ships to the loch for coaling and repairs in 1914-1915.



Between 1939 and 1945 Loch Ewe became an important base for convoys of merchant ships. Initially they went to America. Then, from February 1942, convoys also sailed to Russia through the Arctic. Many men did not return from such perilous journeys. Remains of gun emplacements, look-out posts and camps remain visible all round Loch Ewe, reminding us of its strategic importance and the necessity for protecting the naval base at Aultbea from enemy planes, ships and submarine attacks.

Access by land was controlled at barriers, with local people having to carry passes. An unexpected consequence of this 'restricted area' was that Gruinard Island, just half a mile off-shore, was chosen to be the site of experiments on sheep using deadly anthrax spores in 1942-1943. The intention was to test the potential of anthrax for chemical warfare. Gruinard Island was not clear of contamination until 1990.



THREE WARS

The cost of liberty



Although there were incidents, including serious damage to HMS *Nelson* when it hit a mine laid by a German submarine at the mouth of Loch Ewe in December 1939, and several 'bombing' raids by German planes, there was no direct loss of life from enemy attack in Gairloch parish during either of the two world wars.

However, there were two tragic accidents. Both, coincidentally, involved American servicemen and transport with a 'liberty' connection. The heaviest casualties came when an American 'Liberty' ship, the *William H Welch*, sank during a fierce storm in February 1944 as it was coming into Loch Ewe on convoy duty. Only 12 of the 74 men on board were saved at Black Bay from the oil-covered sea and jagged rocks, despite the valiant efforts of local crofters, the coastguard and many military and naval personnel.



The second accident was in June 1945 when a 'Liberator' bomber, nick-named *Sleepy Time Gal*, crashed onto the moorland beyond Gairloch. Nine crew and six passengers, all American airmen, died near the Fairy Lochs.

Our Liberator model was made by Robin Hudson.

THREE WARS

Gairloch's Anti-aircraft Operations Room (AAOR)



This building, now Gairloch Museum, was originally a Cold War-era, Anti-aircraft Operations Room built in the early 1950s, one of only four in Scotland. Its staff were to co-ordinate the military response should the Loch Ewe Gun-defended Area come under attack from Soviet Russian bombers. This 'nuclear-bomb proof' reinforced concrete bunker was declared redundant in 1956 before ever becoming operational and became the local roads depot.

The model in the reconstructed gallery overlooking what would have been the plotting room below was made by Norman Thomas and Hector Mackenzie. It is based on the standard layout of an AAOR. Around the gallery would be control cabins, operations rooms (signals and telephone), and facilities for male and female officers, including rest rooms and mess rooms. The self-contained community within the bunker was served by generators and ventilation systems.



The landscape and the wildlife of Wester Ross are very precious. The very first National Nature Reserve in Britain was set up at Beinn Eighe in 1951. Since then other forms of protection have been added including SSSIs, National Scenic Areas, and Wild Land Areas. In 2016 the Wester Ross UNESCO Biosphere was created. Five main types of habitat are distinguished in the Museum displays.

Sea and Coast

The sea and the climate here are relatively warm thanks to the North Atlantic Drift, an extension of the Gulf Stream. Rich communities of sea life flourish including seagrass meadows and maerl, which provide a spawning ground for herring and other fish and shellfish. Sea Eagles, once persecuted to extinction, as well as otters and seals, take advantage of the fish.

The coast is a series of sea lochs created by glaciers, with features varying from high cliffs and stacks to sandy beaches, and from quiet bays to wind-blown headlands.

Rivers and Lochs

High rainfall, hard rocks and glaciers have created a landscape with many freshwater lochs, rivers and rushing burns. Loch Maree is, perhaps, the most beautiful loch in Scotland.

Specially protected species include the endangered freshwater pearl mussel and the black-throated diver. Rod angling for trout and salmon remains an important source of income for local estates.



Woodland

The native woodlands of Wester Ross form part of the 'temperate rainforest' of the west coast. They provide ideal conditions for rare mosses and liverworts, lichens, fungi and ferns. 'Atlantic oakwood' flourishes, although large areas were felled in the past to make charcoal for ironworking. Pinewoods are remnants of ancient forests, birchwood is widespread, and other successful trees include Alder, Hazel and Rowan. Recently, native trees have been planted in many areas.

Moorland

The wide open spaces are covered by a mosaic of wet and dry heathlands. On well-drained slopes common heather and grassland dominate. Poorly drained slopes support cross-leaved heath, sedges and mosses. In flat areas, where rock or an iron pan prevents water from draining away, blanket bog forms on a growing layer of peat, an invaluable carbon store.

Unfortunately, bogs are also a favoured habitat for the dreaded Highland midge, which is most active in damp, windless, warm weather.

Mountains

The mountains of Wester Ross are its most striking feature, distinguished by their isolated grandeur, their steepness, and their beauty. Scotland's most remote mountains are in the Great Wilderness area, north of Loch Maree. To the south are the famous Torridon Hills. On the hills, the soil becomes thinner and holds too little water. Where there is no shelter from the wind, only small specialist plants can grow. The ptarmigan, a mountain grouse, camouflages itself by turning white in winter. Golden Eagles soar high, searching for prey such as voles or carrion – and ptarmigan!





The view on this page shows Loch Maree and the hills on its north side. The loch fills a deep trench, carved out by rivers and glaciers, which follows the line of the Loch Maree Fault. The Fault is a major crack in the land which developed about 1,500 million years ago, stretching from east of Glen Docherty to the sea near Rubha Rèidh. It caused the land to the north to move 10 miles east.

The oldest rock to be found in the Gairloch area is Lewisian Gneiss (pronounced 'nice') which at 3,000 million years old is the oldest rock in Western Europe. It started as granite and was metamorphosed several times to make a remarkably varied rock. Its highest point is on the remote mountain A' Mhaighdean. It can be seen on both sides of the road between Gairloch and Poolewe.

The next oldest is Amphibolite from the unique Loch Maree Group, 2,000 million years old. This was originally the basalt floor of an ancient ocean which has been metamorphosed. Other rocks in the Group include various former sea-bed sediments, and a mineral deposit which includes a little gold and silver. The hills behind the Museum are formed of Amphibolite.

At the viewing area outside, across the road, there is a panel which explains the geology visible in the stunning views, with examples of some rocks identified.



Torridonian Sandstone, the biggest sedimentary formation in Britain, is 1,000 million years old. It is the result of large rivers carrying debris from an eroding mountain range in the west. This was laid down as sand and gravel at least four miles thick in a sinking rift valley. The shore below the Museum is one good place to see it. The Torridon hills, including Beinn Alligin and Baosbheinn, are formed of this sandstone.

Another significant rock, best seen on Beinn Eighe, is Cambrian Quartzite. It is a hard, white sandstone composed almost entirely of quartz. This is 'only' 540 million years old, originating as the shore of an ocean to the west when Scotland was still attached to the continent Laurentia (now North America). Evidence of early life can be seen in its upper layers, the so-called Pipe Rock, which is full of fossil 'worm-casts'.

East of Kinlochewe lies another rock, Moine Schist, 900 million years old. This was laid down as sandstone well to the east, but was pushed west by the Moine Thrust about 430 million years ago when another continent, Baltica, collided with ours. The Moine Schist was metamorphosed into a relatively soft rock, to create a gentler landscape, contrasting with the ancient rocky hills west of the Moine Thrust.

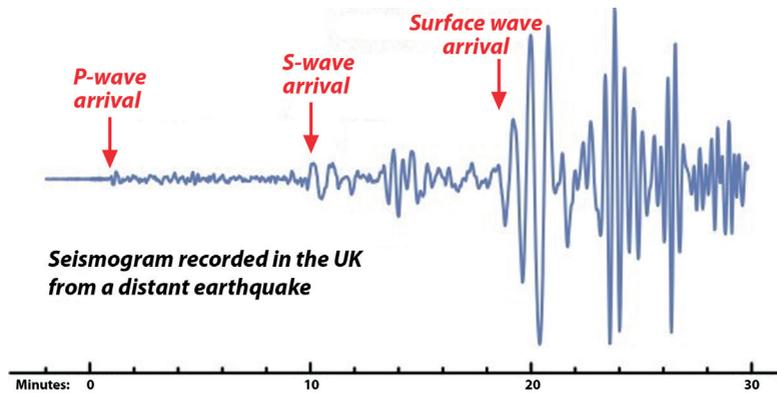
A THE NATURAL WORLD

When the earth moves

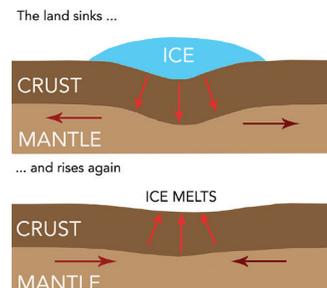


At the peak of the last Ice Age, about 22,000 years ago, a large ice sheet covered Scotland. Glaciers carved out the land, deepening valleys and isolating mountains. As the ice advanced and then retreated, it cut out corries, narrowed mountain ridges, stranded large boulders known as 'erratics', and laid down the sandy basis of soil and gravel all over the land.

Glaciation still has an impact on Wester Ross today. During the Ice Age, the weight of ice made the land sink. Since its retreat, the land has been rising in a process known as glacial rebound. This leaves behind 'raised shorelines' like the one the Museum is built on. It can also cause earth tremors, and in 2013 Gairloch felt two tremors of 2.8 on the Richter Scale. Local residents felt the walls of their houses shudder as if a large bus had passed by.



Fortunately, Britain does not lie on a plate boundary so we do not experience the strong earthquakes which are the result of stresses on plate boundaries as the tectonic plates move. Seismometers measure these earth movements. The one in the Museum is recording real earthquakes around the world.



CROFTING LIFE

Harvesting the sea



The sea has always been an important source of food for the settlers on the coast. Shellfish have been collected along the shore from the earliest times, and walls were built to trap salmon, trout and other sea fish at low tide.



In the 19th century, fishing provided both food and employment for those struggling to live off the land. Most able-bodied men either fished locally or travelled to find work at bigger ports. Gairloch was best known for its cod fishing. The cod was caught using long lines holding up to 1,000 hooks, each one baited by hand, a job usually done by women. There were also several salmon stations, with a jetty, bothy, ice-house and drying green. Herring fleets, often partly crewed by local fishermen, came from the east coast to take a plentiful harvest from the sea into the 20th century. However, by the 1980s, stocks of sea fish had been greatly depleted. Today most local fishermen use creels to catch prawn, crab and lobster, and mobile fishing gear is prohibited in Loch Gairloch.



The croft land was rented from the local estate owner. It was often rough and stony ground which was hard to bring into cultivation. Wherever possible, seaweed was collected from the shore to improve its condition. Agricultural work was carried out using simple tools that were homemade or produced by the local blacksmith. Peat, the main source of fuel for the croft house, was cut in the spring using specially-shaped spades. After cutting, the peats were stacked and left to dry.



Very few crofters had horses so the *càs-chaibe*, a traditional foot plough, was used to prepare the soil for planting crops such as oats and potatoes. Harvesting was a community and family effort, often leaving teachers to despair of the low attendance in the classroom.

Women were kept busy with domestic tasks but also made butter and cheese, spun wool and worked on the croft. It was noted that women could carry manure, weed or dig up potatoes, all while knitting or spinning.



Crofting families lived in small, thatched houses until the early 20th century. The croft house in the Museum has been constructed to show what one might have been like in the mid-19th century. The crofter would have used unmortared stone and the roof trusses were made of any available timber, either the wood from the old house or driftwood collected from the shore. It was more usual here to thatch the roof with rushes, though heather cut from the moor was sometimes used.

The floor was often just beaten-down earth. Sometimes the fire was in the centre, but by the 1850s a fireplace with a wooden hood was usually built into the gable wall. Food was cooked in cast iron pots or on girdles which were suspended over the fire on an adjustable hook and chain.

The lamps, called 'cruisies', burned fish oil. Furnishings were very simple, with many items for the home being handmade, including the cradle, stools and even the spinning wheel.

There was likely to be a wooden box-bed, a dresser, table and chairs, with a long bench or *lannsaid*. Sheets for the bed were often made from cotton sugar bags, bleached and sewn together. Blankets would have been woven or knitted from local wool. Though it looks cosy, keeping the croft house warm and clean would always have been a challenge.

CROFTING LIFE

Summer at the shieling



Until the mid-19th century, it was the custom for women and children to spend about six weeks during the summer at the 'shieling' on higher ground. The men and older boys would drive the livestock up to find fresh pasture and, perhaps, escape from the midges. They would undertake any repairs necessary on the stone and turf hut, replenish the heather for the beds and then return to the croft to work the land.

At the shieling, the women would spin flax and wool to make their clothes and the younger children would mind the animals. Milk was made into cheese, which was placed on planks in the roof to be smoked over the ever-present peat fire. Butter, which was stored in recesses in the thick walls to keep fresh, would be given to the landlord as part payment for rent. The utensils were always wood and women took pride to scrub them so that the milk would not be contaminated.



Picture by Alice Watterson, copyright The Shieling Project and Forestry Commission Scotland

Life at the shieling was simple but enjoyable and has inspired some of the most beautiful Gaelic poetry and song.

EXHIBITION GALLERY



Every 5-6 weeks there is a different exhibition in the gallery. We encourage artists, craftspeople and local groups to share the work they are creating related to the cultural heritage of the area. There might be displays of traditional painting or photography, or a media installation, a video presentation or the story, in words and photographs, of some aspect of our local history. Always something new!



Film theatre

The film theatre offers a 25 minute presentation, commissioned from John English, a professional film-maker who was born in the Highlands. He interviewed local people to record their memories – of daily life on the croft, of local schools, of the use of the Gaelic language, of fishing and transport – all illustrated by contemporary photographs. This documentary film is a valuable record of the changing way of life in Gairloch parish after the upheaval of the Second World War.

Exhibits on the stairs

In 1974 a bicycle designer, John Connell, set up a workshop in Aultbea and produced made-to-measure Wester Ross bicycles. Our quality touring bicycle was ridden for 35,000 miles for Edinburgh commuting and holidays. Peat was the usual fuel for heating and cooking in the croft house. Cut out from the moorland in spring, the peats were left to dry and then stacked. The peat barrow was essential to bring them down before winter. The spinning wheel produced yarn for bedding and clothing much faster than the hand-held distaff spindle (see one in the textiles section), but was, of course, not portable.



Our library and archive offer a wealth of documents, census and estate records, maps and plans, family history material and a substantial and valuable collection of Gaelic literature, music and sermons, dating from the 18th century. We welcome researchers, by appointment.



The Museum shop is particularly strong on books relating to the local heritage (including those which provide detailed context to our displays and objects), natural world and broader Scottish interest. This includes *Gairloch and a Guide to Loch Maree*, which is the definitive book on this area's "history, traditions, people and natural history". It was published in 1886 by John Henry Dixon, a Yorkshire solicitor, who, from 1874-1899, made his home at Inveran, a fishing lodge on Loch Maree.



We also stock a range of guide books and trails to follow, both on foot (starting from the Museum door) and on wheels to explore the highways and byways. But please don't forget to slow down in Wester Ross if you really want to appreciate the landscape, understand the way of life of what are still crofting communities, and listen to the stories and songs that are the heritage of this special place.



We are grateful to the many people who, since the 1970s, have given generously of their time and expertise, donated and interpreted artefacts, collected photographs and memories, and shared their enthusiasm and knowledge with our visitors.

To these must be added the more than 100 volunteers who have contributed in so many diverse ways to secure the future of Gairloch Museum in its new home. The building, and these galleries, displays and activities are testimony to our community spirit and local commitment to keeping our heritage alive.

CONTACT US

Gairloch Museum • Gairloch • IV21 2BH
01445 712287

info@gairlochmuseum.org

www.gairlochmuseum.org

www.facebook.com/gairlochmuseum



LOTTERY FUNDED



Art Fund
Museum of
the Year 2020
Winner



Highlands and Islands Enterprise
Iomairt na Gàidhealtachd's nan Eilean



ACCREDITED
MUSEUM



Association of
Independent
Museums
Helping Heritage
Organisations Prosper

