



CASTLETOWN HERITAGE SOCIETY

Newsletter

Summer 2009

Willie Nicolson

With the passing of Willie Nicolson of Castletown ,Caithness has lost one of nature's gentlemen.

Born in 1926, Willie belonged to that generation for whom hard work and lack of comfort were the norm. He and his wife Maisie contributed their memories of life on the farm featuring in the book " Castletown-Flagstone Village". He would recall rising early at the age of 13 to do two hours' work on the farm of Murza before school. At the end of the year his father could claim two and sixpence extra for his help. He remembered his mother on wash day boiling endless kettles of water on the stove for the family of nine.

Willie's experience with horses made his opinion of great value in Clydesdale breeding circles. Later his expertise helped him to bring out Shetland ponies .One of his proudest moments was to receive the prize for best Shetland stallion and overall champion horse at the Caithness County Show from HRH Princess Anne.

Willie was very much a community man, taking an active part in the activities of the village from bowling to Old Time Dancing. When he and his wife Maisie took over the duties of caretakers of Castletown Drill Hall, they soon gained a reputation for the keeping the cleanest village hall in the county.

Willie had a great facility for figures and what used to be called mental arithmetic. His memory for dates of events, acreages or wages was a great asset to Castletown Heritage .

One duty, which Willie gladly undertook for years, was that of playing Santa Claus at children's Christmas parties. His kindly voice encouraged the most fearful of toddler to come up to receive a gift. Despite him being a well -known village figure, his cover was never blown.

Garden works

A visit to Castlehill will reveal the long hours of labour put in by the tireless Hugh Crowden. Much of the paving has now been laid, the patio is in place and garden beds laid out. As an example of the diverse uses of local stone Castlehill garden is hard to beat.



Planting

The society are greatly indebted to Mrs Irene Wares, who has raised plants from seeds for the garden, and tended them with care before planting out. The circular herb garden is now complete and the long border has received seasonal attention.



Irene has also set out this year's tribute flower bed in recognition of the 1000 servicemen who were stationed here during the WW11 . TheRAF roundel recalls 504 squadron who were the first to arrive and the last to leave RAF Castletown at Thurdistoft.



Annual General Meeting

At a recent AGM the following office-bearers were elected.

Chair - Muriel Murray

Secretary - Carol Thomas,

Treasurer - John Crowden,

Vice chair - Elizabeth Geddes,

Committee members - Hugh

Crowden, Christine Crowden,

Sharon Pottinger.

County Show

Look out for the CHS stand at the Caithness County Show in Wick on 18th July

Opening hours

The centre is open to the public all year round on Wednesday, Saturday and Sundays afternoons from 2pm to 4 pm. wVisits at other times can be arranged by phoning 01847 821 204 or on castletown.heritage@talk21.com

Annual subscriptions

Many thanks to those who paid at the AGM. For those who wish to remain members but were unable to attend the meeting, a form is attached for your convenience.

Name

Address

Email

Subscription £3 for individual membership and £5 for family.

Please send or hand in to
Castletown Heritage Society
Harbour Road
Castletown KW14 8TG

Death of Dame Heather Begg

Heather Begg was born in New Zealand of Castletown parents but returned here in 1932, when Heather was two years old. She and her sisters were brought up in the village in a house full of music. On her return to New Zealand she trained as an opera singer and sang there, in Australia and London. She was a friend of and sang along with Dame Joan Sutherland whose family came from Portskerra. Such was her success that she was created a Dame, just days before her death in May 2009.

Local Musical Heritage

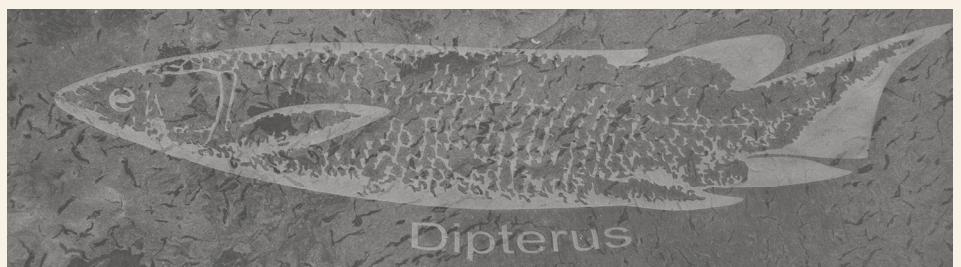
One of the less well documented local traditions of this area is its music. This autumn CHS is embarking on a project to research the work songs, ballads, church music, pipe and accordion tunes with local significance. Led by acclaimed folk singer Nancy Nicolson, the public will have the chance to sing and play the old tunes. We appeal to anyone who recalls what was sung in bygone days at work and at play to let us know.

Archaeology project

Following last year's successful HLF funded search for signs of Viking and Norse habitation on Dunnet Bay, the next stages of coring and excavations are being put in place. Check the web-site and local posters for details. Volunteers very welcome.

Old Fossils

Two examples of the primeval history of the region are to be seen at Castlehill.



A large piece of stone, recently excavated in the Castlehill area has been laser engraved with images of some of the fossil fish found in Caithness. Nathalie and Tamara of Caithness Stone Industries have used modern technology to create something new out of something very old.

Inside the building is a real slab of stone containing no less than five fossil fish embedded in a piece of stone. This rare and interesting item along with a clear explanation, has become one of the Centre's showpieces. CHS is very grateful to Alan Saxon for the donation of the stone.

