



TAIGH-TASGAIDH NA GAIDHEALTACHD AN IAR

## NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2019

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West Highland Museum

### Message from the Chairman

We let down future generations if we fail to acknowledge the contribution of those who have gone before us and it is with much gratitude that we mark the passing of our late colleague John Gooch. As readers will know, John was the grand-nephew of Victor Hodgson, the founder of our Museum and John supported our enterprise steadfastly, always in a forward-looking way, throughout his life. Just occasionally, we attend a funeral service which is enjoyable and John's was one of those. As a fellow engineer and almost the same vintage, I had a quiet chuckle when Caroline during her outstanding tribute mentioned that her father still used a slide rule, given that I sometimes do so myself! You will feel the warmth of Richard Sidgwick's tribute elsewhere in this newsletter.

I do hope that you enjoy this newsletter, at the core of which can be seen solid evidence of the hard work and dedication of our staff, Colleen, Vanessa and Sonja. Our staff and our enthusiastic army of volunteers earn our thanks with their dedication and support throughout the year. How we are perceived by our visitors is entirely due to them.

Elsewhere in the newsletter you will read Vanessa's item on the hidden portrait Jacobite snuff box, which we have been able to purchase thanks to grants and generous donations.

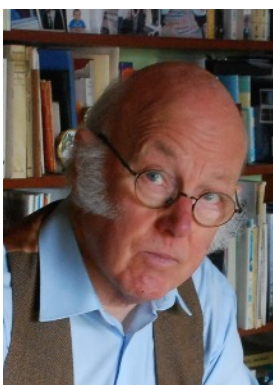
We are very grateful for your ongoing support. If you have not become a member of the West Highland Museum Trust, please do so; from the membership come our future board members.

Again, I take the opportunity to remind you of our well-established bookshop which has a voucher scheme that should be of interest for Christmas gifts. Please consider this and also tell your friends!

I started with a farewell and conclude with a valedictory theme as I stand down as Chair of the Museum after a seven-year term. We have seen several changes over that time and I am grateful for the support of the board, previous trustees, staff and volunteers over the years. I think I was first appointed to the Management Committee around 1993! I am sure that the Museum will continue to develop and I wish my successor Ian Peter MacDonald well.

With best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

**John C Hutchison**  
Chair (until 21<sup>st</sup> November)



### Message from the Manager

We have once again had a great number of visitors. In October we exceeded 2018's figure of 56,111 visitors. By the end of the year over 60,000 visitors will have stepped through our door, which is absolutely amazing!

Our visitors come from all over the world and in the last few years have included many Outlander fans. We had a great number of primary school pupils visit to learn about the Jacobites, the Victorians and World War 2 and to tour our museum.

I am pleased to be able to tell you that as well as our visitor numbers being up on 2018, our donation jars have also received more donations to date in comparison to 2018. The gift shop and bookshop have also continued to increase turnover and profit, which benefits the Museum directly.

Sonja McLachlan with the help of myself and a couple of the volunteers keep the shop well stocked and we have introduced a few new lines which are selling well. With the increase in time required to keep on top of the stock-taking, Sonja's hours have been increased this year from 20 to 25 hours. If you are in Fort William do pop in to have a look at our shop and perhaps do some Christmas shopping.

I organised a trip to the Perth Museum & Art Gallery as a thank you to our volunteers for helping out at the Museum. We had a ballot to choose which museum to visit and Perth came out tops. There is a report on this trip in this newsletter which I am sure you will enjoy.

We will be remaining open six days a week. Our off-season visitors do appreciate this, as most museums in the Highlands are closed from October until April.

We have this year increased Vanessa, the Curator's, hours from 15 to 20 hours, which has been well used organising many events in the Museum and making changes to the interpretation of the collection.

Just some of the events we had this year were, an "Easter Chick Hunt" and in the October school holidays' a "Dinosaur Hunt", which was very popular with children of all ages. We organised a Christmas children's event to tie in with the switching on of the Christmas lights in Cameron Square.

We ran various events during the Highland Archaeological Festival which you will read about in this newsletter. As part of the Museums at Night Festival Iain Rose entertained our volunteers telling the tale of the "Appin Murder". We have hosted two joint events with Lochaber Archive Centre. The first was an "Outlander Day" in June, and in November we hosted a "Commandos and World War II" event focusing on commando training at Achnacarry and exploring the archive material relating to Lochaber during the war.

On a final note, we rely on volunteers to help run the Museum front of house, help with the school visits and behind the scenes. If you are interested in finding out more about our volunteering opportunities, please do contact us.

**Colleen Barker**  
Museum Manager

whm  
West Highland Museum



## Curator's Update

2019 has been an exciting year at the Museum. This year has very much focused on enhancing our Jacobite collection. In January some of the prestigious Drumbuie Collection arrived at the Museum on long term loan. Exquisite Jacobite glassware and other iconic pieces should be on display in our Jacobite exhibition for a minimum of three years. Interpretation in some of the cases has been updated too.

In August we were able to purchase a rare hidden portrait snuff mull for the collection at auction. And, in November, we received a surprise acquisition. A private donor gifted us a book written shortly after the 1745 Rising. It details the early life of Prince Charles Edward Stuart up until Culloden. It is titled "Young Juba" and was published in London in 1748. Articles featured throughout this newsletter provide more details about some of these objects.

Other acquisitions this year have reflected a diverse range of Highland history. Gifts from generous donors include: a small collection of embroidered World War I postcards; a World War II military issue sporran; an iron ring used to moor birlinns outside old Inverlochy Castle found in the River Lochy; and a rare shinty medal from the 1897 Camanachd Cup final between Beaulieu and Brae Lochaber. Sadly, Brae Lochaber lost! The medal will officially be presented to us on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 2020 at a fundraising talk in aid of the Museum. Dr Hugh Dan MacLennan will deliver a lecture titled "The Caman and The Culluinn". Tickets are available now from the Museum. Please do come along and support us.

**Vanessa Martin**  
Curator



## "Clanship to Capitalism" Book Launch

Following on from a successful launch at the Lime Tree Gallery, the Museum hosted Richard Sidgwick for the launch of his new book, "Clanship to Capitalism" on Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2018.

Richard detailed the rationale for the book, it being a definitive story of the evolution of Lochaber's landed properties between 1745 and the present day. He wove an exciting and enticing story of fact and anecdote bringing the book to life for the audience, using some of the 200 original maps and illustrations.

Richard signed copies of the book after the talk and the guests enjoyed drinks and nibbles. The launch was very well attended by locals, museum members, staff and volunteers.

"Clanship to Capitalism" is available from the West Highland Museum for £45, or directly from the author.

**Sonja McLachlan**



## Introducing Our New Chair of Directors

*The Museum's Board of Directors welcomed Ian Peter MacDonald as their Chair in November 2019. Here Ian Peter tells us a bit about himself:*



"From a family with a long history of involvement with the Museum, I am a local brewer making Glen Spean beer in Spean Bridge.

Having written a 72-page essay on the Massacre of Glencoe at 11 and an 87-page essay on Montrose at 12, I was always interested in the distinct history of the West Highlands.

Following a degree in Art History at Aberdeen University, I have furthered that interest throughout my working life. I made merchandise for museums across the world from our factory in Bo'ness working with every major museum from the Louvre to the West Highland Museum. Employing currently 67 folk and with sales of £4 million, exporting over 65% of the output, this has grown into a substantial enterprise. Subsequent work included building the business of leading Scottish auction house, Lyon & Turnbull, both in London and the Highlands has brought me close to the terrific history of Scotland's creativity as well as understanding the enormous responsibility in looking after this distinct heritage. Always an enthusiast for the specific character of regional history I was on the management committee of both the Nelson Norfolk Museum and the East Anglian Art Fund during our time in the south.

My wife, Viv is a familiar character in Lochaber known from her work as a lecturer in computing studies, as Chair of the Lochaber Gymnastics Club, as the Vice Chair of Lochailnet, as well as being a popular local radio presenter. We have four children ranging from 28 down to our 13-year-old daughter, Sarah who is in her second year at Lochaber High School.

I am very much looking forward to the challenge of chairing the West Highland Museum. So much has been achieved under the direction of John Hutchinson and his team, leading to the incredible number of visitors we now enjoy. My objectives are to concentrate on enhancing the experience of these visitors and making the Museum a comfortable and ever more enjoyable place to work, as a well as visit."

**Ian Peter MacDonald**  
New Chair

## Jim Lee

Shortly before we published it was with great sadness that we heard of the passing away of Jim Lee.

He was a regular volunteer at the Museum for the last four years and a great supporter of ours. His knowledge of the local area and its history were invaluable to staff, volunteers and visitors alike and he enjoyed his time with us. He also wrote a very interesting article on the Kings House hotel for our annual report in 2016.

A celebration of his life was held on Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December at the Moorings Hotel, Fort William. Our thoughts are with his wife Carole at this sad time.

**Sonja McLachlan**



## A Tribute to John Gooch

John died peacefully in the Belford Hospital on the 30<sup>th</sup> October, shortly after having a stroke whilst in church the previous Sunday. How fitting that the closing conscious moments of this quiet, gentle man should coincide with reciting The Lord's Prayer, which had guided him and Mary through long and eventful lives. That same day, his family were going to celebrate his 90<sup>th</sup> birthday and 60 years at Hill



House, Onich; the fact that the lunch took a different form did nothing to detract from the significance of both anniversaries.

His mother had a long family connection with Onich, where her family lived at Cuilchenna House, and John grew up with his brother and sister at The White House which was built by his father. One of his abiding passions was the wellbeing of The West Highland Museum which was established largely through the energy and determination of his great uncle, Victor Hodgson. He was a trustee for the better part of 50 years.

After a traditional education at prep school and Eton, followed by National Service, he read engineering at Trinity College, Cambridge and many of his interests focussed on related matters such as steam trains, marine engines and the solution to any problem that required graph paper and a slide rule. His first job was with Parsons Marine Turbine Engines, after which he taught engineering at Brunel University for more than 50 years. In the closing stages of his career, the University started to conduct student satisfaction surveys; to his great delight he was chosen as their favourite lecturer, an outcome perhaps not unconnected with his generation's scepticism about any absurd element of 'health and safety.'

John's greatest delight was in his wife Mary who died last year, their two daughters, Caroline and Helen and their grandsons; this was accompanied by a deep Christian conviction and generosity of spirit that was evident in so much that they did. He and Mary faced family misfortunes, including a near fatal car crash in recent years in which both were seriously injured, with the fortitude and mutual support which characterised their relationship, always underpinned by their faith.

He lost consciousness in the place to which he was so attached, with the people he loved beside him, and was finally laid to rest in the little cemetery overlooking the waters of Loch Linnhe, where he and his family had spent many happy hours.

Requiescat in pace.

**Richard Sidgwick**

### Interesting place

*I stumbled on this little gem by accident. Going inside I was warmly greeted and shown where to go on this self-guided tour. There was so much history here! All the displays were interesting and I learned a lot. There was no charge for admission only a donation box.*

Nova Scotia, Canada



## An Iconic Acquisition with a Secret

We were delighted to have the opportunity to purchase a rare hidden portrait Jacobite snuff box at the Lyon and Turnbull auction in Edinburgh in August.

It is a mid-18th century circular box with enamel tartan decoration, the hinged cover opens to reveal a plain interior, however, the hidden double lid opens to reveal a finely enamelled portrait of Prince Charles Edward Stuart in tartan jacket with orders of The Garter and Thistle decorations, white cockade and blue bonnet.

Hidden portrait snuff boxes such as this are amongst the most iconic Jacobite works of art. This example is in particularly good condition and finely enamelled. The portrait is a variant of the famous Robert Strange example which likely date this piece to circa 1750.

The Museum has been established as a "Jacobite Museum" since its inception in 1922. We have many unique and unusual objects already in our collection such as the Secret Portrait of Bonnie Prince Charlie and his death mask. This iconic object will be a valuable addition to our Jacobite collection and is now on permanent display.

We would not have been able to acquire this fine object for the collection without the financial support of the National Fund for Acquisitions, the Art Fund and a very generous local donor. We are most grateful to everyone who has contributed to make this purchase possible. The final price for the snuff box at auction was £9,750.

**Vanessa Martin**



## Timeline Installation

The Governor's Room has been given a wee make over courtesy of Collections and Learning Committee member, Ian Skinner.

Ian has been busy researching the history of Fort William and produced an informative timeline charting the history of the town. This is now on display in the Museum.

**Ian Skinner**



## Outlander Day – 14<sup>th</sup> June

The popular time travelling television and book series “Outlander” continues to be of interest to many visitors. So, when the Lochaber Archive Centre asked us to jointly host an “Outlander day” with them, we jumped at the opportunity.

Betty Bruce gave an entertaining guided tour of the Museum and visitors then had the opportunity to see rare Jacobite relics from our collection, not usually seen by the public. These included trews said to have belonged to Prince Charles Edward Stuart and the stone said to have been used to raise the Prince’s Standard at Glenfinnan in August 1745.

A delicious Jacobite themed buffet lunch was then served in the Old Fort’s Governor’s room. This room happens to be central to the plot in the first Outlander book.

Visitors spent the afternoon at the nearby Lochaber Archive Centre where they examined some fascinating documents from the Jacobite period, including an 18<sup>th</sup> century contemporary account of the Battle of Prestonpans.



Top: Betty Bruce with the Outlander group in the Governor’s Room. A fictitious version featured in the first series of Outlander.

Bottom: The group examining documents at the Lochaber Archive

## Commandos and World War II – 9<sup>th</sup> November

Peter Mennie, Archivist from the Lochaber Archive Centre delivered a fascinating talk about wartime Lochaber and gave attendees a glimpse at what life was like for locals during the war. The Archive Centre brought along some of the Museum’s wartime letters and manuscripts with them for visitors to examine.

Paul Macdonald from MacDonald Armouries then gave an entertaining presentation on Commando training in Lochaber. He dressed in contemporary uniform and brought along an impressive array of commando weapons for visitors to inspect, including rare and iconic Fairbairn-Sykes fighting knives.

39 people packed into the Commando Exhibition room to hear about the Commandos and the Second World War and an enjoyable morning was had by all.



Top: Paul MacDonald discussing Commando training

Bottom: Peter Mennie delivering a talk about wartime Lochaber

## Commando Painting gifted to Museum

It was a pleasure to welcome the Longley brothers to the Museum in June. They travelled to Fort William from the south of England and presented us with their late Great Uncle’s painting of the Spean Bridge Commando Memorial which had been bequeathed to the Museum.

Artist Frank Longley, a member of the Royal Academy of Arts, painted his dramatic picture of the Commando Memorial at Spean Bridge with a spectacular red sky out of admiration for the Commandos.

Longley’s admiration for the Commandos came after an encounter with them in the desert during the Second World War. He was greatly impressed by the men and their actions. He regularly visited Achnacarry and the Commando Memorial in his later years.

During 2019 the painting has been on temporary display in the Commando exhibition.



Curator Vanessa Martin with brothers Stewart, Michael and Peter Longley (Photograph courtesy of Iain Ferguson)



## Museum Outing to Perth Museum and Art Gallery

On Sunday morning, the 20th October 2019, 13 members of staff and volunteers set off for the annual outing. This year we were heading for Perth Museum and Art Gallery. It was a cold and damp morning with snow on the hills.

On arrival at the Museum we were welcomed by Jordan Irvine, Senior Officer for Communities and Learning. Tea and coffee were provided while Jordan gave us an introductory talk. He gave us the background of the Museum. It being built in 1824 as a Museum and Art Gallery and named after a former Provost of Perth Thomas H. Marshall. They are at the moment in a time of change as they are trying to acquire another building in Perth. If this happens, they are hoping to bring the Stone of Destiny back to Perth. There are several galleries of which three feature changing exhibitions.

After the talk Kenny showed us around the Museum. The Museum is well laid out beginning with Wild and Wonderful - a trail of exhibits about Perthshire's flora, fauna and geology, with hands on sections, great for children. Included here is the South Corston fragment of the Strathmore meteorite. It then goes on to how Perth developed as a town and city. The next section - the Pantheon explores how different cultures conceive the hidden powers that guide our lives.

The changing galleries have at the moment an exhibition on the role of women in farming and on the land. Finally, the Jacobite exhibition which was just coming to an end. It was very well displayed and told the story with reference to the local clans around the Perth area. There was a beautiful display of Jacobite glass with fantastic lighting showing the glass off to maximum effect.

After this we were shown around the store by one of the curators, Rhona. Every museum has its storage area and this was in the basement and was huge. They only have about 10% of their collection on display. There were - I think - more than 12 rooms and each was bursting at the seams with well stored items. From Penny farthings to old gas cookers, from ancient pottery to fragile butterflies and insects. From paintings to furniture and the mummy of a woman, Ta-Kr-Hb. It was fascinating. How anything is ever found I don't know.

After this we dispersed for lunch and then had time to ourselves to browse the collection at our leisure.

We set off home at 4pm after a very interesting, informative and enjoyable day accompanied by a very colourful sunset over Loch Laggan.



**Helen Curran**

*Perth curator, Rhona, touring the storage facilities with volunteers.*

*Staff and volunteers enjoy a day trip to Perth Museum and Art Gallery*



## A Lochaber Love Story: Postcards from the Trenches



*Catriona Bruce and some of her grandfather's postcard collection (Photograph courtesy of Iain Ferguson)*

A collection of First World War postcards on loan to the Museum featured in a temporary exhibition in Spring 2019.

The Highlife Highland "Coming Home: World War I in the Highlands" toured the Highlands this year and spent two months at the Museum. It focused on the Highland experience of the conflict at war and on the home front. It was popular in attracting local visitors to the Museum.

We added a local dimension to the exhibition with the love story of John and Mary McCallum. John sent postcards from France between October 1916 and February 1919 to his Lochaber lass Mary. Mary attended Fort William School and taught at Ballachulish before she married John in 1916. They married during the war when John was serving as a sergeant in the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. The newlyweds were soon separated after their marriage when six months later John was shipped off to fight on the Western Front.

The beautifully embroidered postcards were made by local French women as a way of supplementing their income during the war. Soldiers bought postcards to send home to their loved ones. John sent his postcards to Mary at the family croft at Aultshellach, North Ballachulish.

After the war, John was discharged from the army and appointed Headmaster of Kinlochleven School. The couple started a family soon afterwards and remained in the Highlands until John retired in 1938 and the couple moved to the Glasgow area.

The postcards were loaned to us by John and Mary's granddaughter Catriona Bruce. The ten postcards used in the exhibition have subsequently been gifted to the Museum and are now part of our permanent collection. We are very grateful to the family for their generosity.

When Catriona came to visit the exhibition, she wore her grandmother's engagement ring. If you look closely you can see it in the photograph!

**Vanessa Martin**

## There was Light

Lighting in Highland croft houses was until comparatively recently very poor. It was usually a case of up at dawn and to bed at dusk, since artificial illumination was almost non-existent and when obtainable difficult to maintain. However, man has ever been inventive and from earliest times has contrived various forms of artificial light from lamps and candles.

Using whatever was available one such example was fir candles. These consisted of splinters of resinous fir wood or, even more prized, resinous knots from the tree. To be efficient these had to be very dry, so they were sometimes placed between the links of the pot chain or rammed into the spaces into the spaces of a barred girdle and hung over the fire. When thoroughly dry, they were either placed on a flat stone or held by an iron clip, the other end of which could be poked into the wall.

Cruisie lamps were a little more effective. Cruisies were made of two leaf shaped vessels. The upper part was fixed on a ratchet above the lower so that drips could be caught. Wicks were made of peeled rushes and the fuel was generally fish oil or mutton fat. The combined smells from the cruiseie, food cooking, unwashed bodies and peat reek must have made the atmosphere within the croft kitchen very very pungent indeed.

Candles were, at first, used mostly by the upper classes but by the nineteenth century had reached many croft houses. These candles were made by pouring melted mutton fat into tin moulds in which a wick had already been placed. These moulds varied in size from those for six candles to those for two small candles. Candlesticks also varied from the much-prized brass or porcelain of the more affluent, to humbler tin or even wooden holders.

By the late nineteenth century, oil lamps had made their appearance. The quality of light was very much improved but they still made work for the Highland housewife. Paraffin had to be carried in gallon or half gallon containers from the nearest source of supply. Vehicle transport was very limited and most people walked lugging the containers. In the household glass had to be cleaned and polished daily. The wicks required to be trimmed and adjusted regularly to prevent smoking. Doing the lamps was a daily time-consuming task.

Eventually paraffin lamps gave way to Tilley lamps which needed a little less time spent on maintenance and gave much better illumination.

By 1894 the Fort William Electric Lighting Company made Fort William the first town in Scotland to have its streets lit by locally produced electricity. Local people shopping in Glasgow or Edinburgh thought the gas lit shops rather dull and dingy compared to Fort William's electrically lit streets. However, electricity was slow to reach outlying crofts. Even in the 1950s at many village halls there was an intermission during the Friday/Saturday dances so that the Tilley lamps could be pumped up. Finally, by the mid 1960s most crofts had electricity.

Nowadays most homes have clean bright light, heating and many, many labour-saving devices thanks to electricity. When one thinks of the dimness, the dirt, the smell and hard work of previous forms of illumination, perhaps we should not complain too much about the expense but be thankful for the amenity which is electricity.

**Betty Bruce**

*Pictures, above: A square cruiseie lamp from the Museum's collection used by craftsmen*

*From the 19<sup>th</sup> century crofters used candles as a source of light*



## Rare 1928 Print Sold

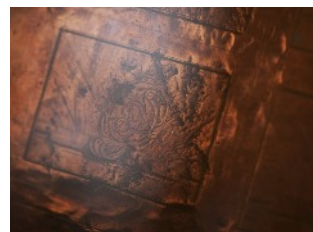
In 1928 the Museum arranged for Sir D.Y. Cameron R.A., Scottish artist and etcher, to print a limited edition of 57 impressions from the "Strange Plate" to raise funds for the Museum. Prints sold for 10/6 each.

On 9th October 2019 one of the prints sold at the Lyon & Turnbull "Rare Books, Manuscripts, Maps & Photography" auction in Edinburgh for £875.

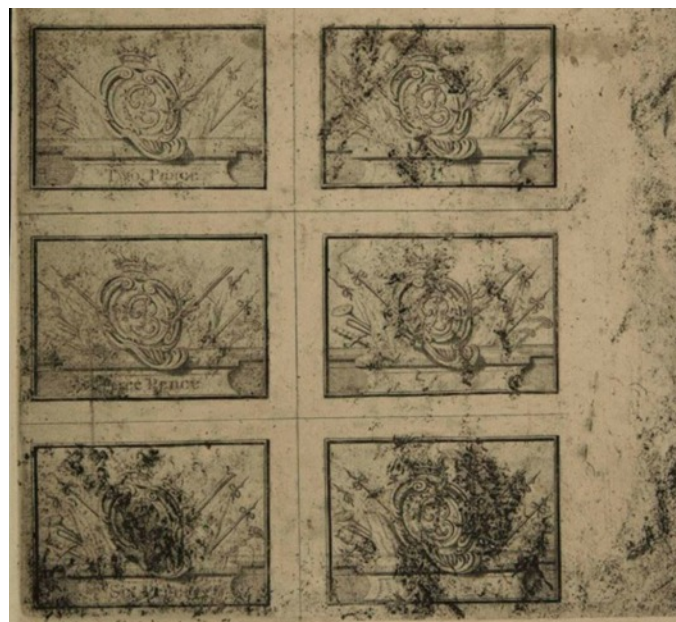
The print was made from the copper "Strange Plate" that has been in the Museum's collection since the 1920s.

The plate is the work of Sir Robert Strange, who hastily prepared the plate due to a sudden need by the Prince for currency. Strange was commissioned for notes of amounts from £200 downwards, but no notes were ever printed. The print run was due to begin on 13 April 1746, but the Duke of Cumberland's Army approached and three days later were triumphant at Culloden. The defeated Jacobites were scattered and the plate disappeared. The copper plate was found near the West end of Loch Laggan later in April 1746, probably thrown aside by the Jacobites during their flight after Culloden. It was given to Ewen MacPherson of Cluny where it remained in the family for many years.

In 1928 the copper plate was sold to the Museum. It is on display in our Jacobite exhibition alongside one of our own copies of the Sir D.Y. Cameron print.



*The Strange Plate  
A 1928 Sir D. Y. Cameron print*



### *Very interesting museum*

*Initially I had no interest at all in visiting the museum. My wife obliged me to go in. The museum was fascinating and is well worth a visit.*

*London, England*





# 150 Years of the Lochaber Curling Club

The Lochaber Curling club will celebrate its 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary next year. On 28<sup>th</sup> January 1870 a group of Fort William's townsmen gathered in the Caledonian Hotel (now MacIntyres solicitors opposite the Museum) where it was resolved that a Curling Club should be formed. The club has been continuously active ever since and continues to compete against other curling clubs in Inverness and has its own league competitions played in Glasgow.

For the first 100 years of the club the sport was entirely dependent on weather conditions. When the ice came a notice was hung on the railings of the now demolished Kennedy Monument in Cameron Square announcing "Curling in Glen Nevis tonight". Some 32 members are listed in the 1870 club minute book and numbers have stayed up fairly steadily since.



Curling in Glen Nevis c.1900

The early exploits of the club are worthy of some admiration: The Glasgow Herald of, January 5, 1885 records that "The Lochaber Curling Club had an excellent game on Saturday. The knights of the broom, getting impatient that there was no ice to play on the low ground, resolved to ascend to Lochan Meall-an-t-Suidhe 1850ft. above sea level. Accordingly, three horses were laden with curling stones and brooms. These were despatched at 8 A.M., and the curlers left at 9 A.M., arrived at the lake 10.30A.M., and found the ice excellent, of unknown thickness, and any strength. There was no snow on it, but slight snow fell during the game. Play was continued for four hours. A number of skaters followed the curlers. The whole party arrived at Fort-William at 6 P.M."

It's recorded that a curling club at Spean Bridge preceded that of the Lochaber club and the naming of the Fort William Club as the Lochaber C.C. caused some consternation in Spean Bridge circles at the time. They too must have been a hardy bunch – their first curling rink was 2000ft up the hill behind Letterfinlay! There were curling ponds all over Lochaber including Ardgour, Onich, Ballachulish, Invergarry, Roybridge and Spean Bridge where there were two.

Another famous exploit of the Lochaber Curlers is recorded in "The Scotsman" of 13<sup>th</sup> February 1895 written by local headmaster Colin Livingstone and later President of the club titled "curling under difficulties". Taking advantage of the opening of the West Highland Railway a curling match was arranged at Rannoch with the Lochaber curlers arriving from Fort William by train and the curling club of Dall gathering from the south. The game started straightforwardly enough but as it progressed a flurry of snow progressed to a blizzard and when the curlers could not see from one end of the ice to the other they retreated to a workman's hut left from the construction of the railway. Little did they know that this storm heralded the onset of the severe winter of 1894/5 which rapidly progressed to block the railway. They were marooned at Rannoch for 3 days! Fortunately there was enough food to sustain them and drinks – but it is recorded that soft drinks were

unsuitable as they froze necessitating the consumption of spirituous liquor.

The Museum currently is displaying the Strathcona Cup a large solid silver challenge cup presented by

Lord Strathcona in 1900 to the Ballachulish and

Glencoe Curling Club "to be competed for annually by the curlers of Oban, Appin, Ardgour & Fort William". The cup was won in March 2019 for Lochaber by a rink skipped by David Mee.

Donald Alexander Smith Lord Strathcona built and resided in Glencoe House. He had left Scotland and his job as a junior Clerk at the age of 17 to work for the Hudson's Bay Company in Canada. His talent for strategic thinking and attention to detail led him to the post as High Commissioner in Canada and the title of Lord Strathcona. He played a major part in the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railroad and drove in the last spike of the rail road in 1885. He returned to Scotland in the same year at the age of 75 years.

Is the Lochaber Curling Club the oldest sporting club in Lochaber? Would you like to join?

**Chris Robinson**



Fort William v. Spean Bridge c.1905



Current members of the club - Iain Forsyth, Jo Cowan, Gavin Reid and Donny Stewart in Glen Nevis 2017

## Great collection of local history

You could spend hours among the interesting collection of historical artefacts in this museum! The museum is well laid out, easy to find, and very extensive. Entry is free, but do make a donation if you can to support the wonderful work of the museum!

Sydney, Australia



The Museum organised four events in September and October 2019 as part of this year's Highland Archaeology Festival. The Festival celebrates the heritage of the Highlands from earliest settlers to modern times, below ground and above. Hundreds of events throughout the region are promoted by Highland Council.

## Siege of Fort William Guided Walk



Over 20 participants gathered at the foot of the Cow Hill on a misty morning and as we progressed up the hill the sun broke through revealing the panorama which would have greeted the Jacobite forces sieging the Fort in March 1746. Recent discoveries around the site of the sugar loaf (the prominent rock festooned with a St. Andrews Cross), from where the bombardment of the Fort began, include parts of a 13" mortar. The party continued up the hill to a large rock on which is engraved the keep of a castle which may have been a random doodle by one of the sieging Jacobites. The party then descended past an old curling pond and through the line of the Borough Boundary and down to road level to the Craigs Burial Ground to examine a prominent rock at the back of the garden where it is recorded on a contemporary map that the rebels "skulked"!

Then under the arch of the old Fort to see the monument to Ewen MacLachlan, a local lad o' parts from Coruanan who became an important poet and the foremost Gaelic scholar of his day. And on to hear the sad story of a wee girl who drowned at Steall in the River Nevis and the mystical story of second sight which grew up around the discovery of her body.

And finally, to the tombstone of Donald MacBain, a Royalist soldier, duellist, prize fighter and pimp and author of the "Expert Swordsman's Companion". He was said to have killed 21 men in duels in his lifetime and was the soldier who made the famous leap across the River Garry whilst escaping from the battle of Killiecrankie. He probably wrote his book here in Fort William in the 1720's, where he had retired "to repent of my former wickedness". His magnificent tombstone was thought to have been lost until very recently.

**Chris Robinson**

## Blarmachfoldach Guided Walk

The next day a fresh party gathered at the picnic spot above Upper Achintore to hear the tale of the "Rotten Egg Well" which will now be beneath the housing estate of Upper Achintore. Donald "Skeegan" Cameron who joined the party recollected that as a small boy occasional family expeditions set out on Sundays to find it and partake of its foul smelling, but apparently medicinal, waters. It once raised the hopes of the town's elders that it could elevate Fort William to the status of a Spa Town. Then onward past the "Plague House" and on to the story of the Fort William Electric Lighting Company's hydro scheme on the River Kiashnish. This allowed Fort William to claim it was one of the very first towns in Britain to be lit by hydro generated electricity in 1896.

We then moved on to hear about the Cameron family who lived in a now empty house sheathed in cast iron which once acted as a temporary schoolhouse. The teacher, a Miss Cassells, was evidently handy with punishment by striking the children with a ruler. Mysteriously all the school's rulers disappeared over time and may yet be rediscovered on the day when the floorboards in the house are lifted – they were "lost" through the cracks!

And then onto the graveyard at Blarmachfoldach, a poignant spot where lie the Cameron family. The very best prehistoric cup marks in Lochaber were then visited on a prominent rock above the fields of Blairchaorin. The "expedition" was rounded off with the discovery of gold nuggets piercing the schist at the roadside en route to Lundavra!

These short excursions in perfect weather seem to have been enjoyed by all those who participated.

**Chris Robinson**

## Kid's Club: Dig Through History

The wee ones came along for a big dig at the Museum. The event was aimed at 6 – 12 year olds.

We disinterred through three layers of burial material. Artefacts found were nuts, shells, lots of pieces of broken china, some jewellery and part of a broken sandal – sole and some leather straps and finally a hand grenade. This was all sorted into the different time periods we thought each finding belonged to. We had very early man subsisting on nuts and shell fish and

probably venison since a scrap of leather was found. Pieces of a terracotta bowl with drawings sketched on it seemed to come from that time. Next came the broken china which seemed perhaps Victorian especially a mug with flag and writing. Lastly the grenade obviously was World War 2. The jewellery - a bracelet of carved linked roundels and a large ring also with carved design were thought to be of foreign perhaps eastern origin perhaps arrived through trade. After everything was sorted pictures were drawn of the homes where these artefacts may have been used. The terracotta bowl was successfully glued together, no such luck with the Victorian mug. Finally, a bit of fun – everyone was blown up by the hand grenade!

**Betty Bruce**

## Responsible Metal Detecting & Treasure Trove

On 5th October, local metal detectorist, Ross Hunter came along to the Museum with an array of his local finds. A variety of precious treasures were displayed including a Letterfinlay shoulder belt plate, Kilmallie parish communion tokens and an intricately designed annular brooch. Ross was on hand to give his expert advice to those interested in starting a metal detecting career.

We were pleased to welcome Emily Freeman from the Treasure Trove Unit in Edinburgh. Local metal detecting enthusiasts brought their finds along for an "Antiques Roadshow" style identification session. Emily was impressed with some quality finds, which she took back to the National Museum of Scotland with her for identification.

**Vanessa Martin**





## A visit to Achnacarry



It was at the kind invitation of Donald Cameron of Lochiel that on 8<sup>th</sup> September 30 museum members and volunteers, ably shepherded by Colleen and Sonja, set off to visit Achnacarry House and Museum.

We drove in comfort by bus and car to our destination and discovered a fine early Georgian home gently justifying the title 'stately'. Our journey was in stark contrast to that of those would-be commandos who, in the 1940s marched 7 miles from Spean Bridge railway station to a stripped down and probably chilly Achnacarry, to undergo 6 weeks harsh training.

Our party was met by Donald Cameron who welcomed us to



his home. Starting in the lobby and the hall, he gave us brief details of the armoury and the family portraits. The dome above the hall was set on fire while the Commandos were in residence but now restored, it gives dignity to the hall. The drawing room, recently re-decorated, is charming. Full length windows give lovely views of the countryside.



We were all impressed by a book of photographs of superb pictures painted directly onto the walls of rooms in the house, depicting events during the commando-training period. These were the work of one of the men, probably an

instructor as they must have been executed over a period longer than 6 weeks. After the war there was no way they could be preserved but the photographs show a masterly hand at work.

In the grand dining room, we enjoyed a delicious finger-food lunch provided by Tanya Warner of Farmstead Fayre, supplemented by some homemade baking supplied by volunteers.

The dining room windows look out onto a spectacular scene of the river Arkaig curling round the house. The most recently remodelled area is the kitchen; a dream of a place to work in.

Out of sight of the house is the hydro scheme, income from which contributed to the refurbishment of Achnacarry. The house is heated by biomass which benefits the house the more it is used.

The Clan Cameron Museum, once the Post Office, tells the story of the part played by Cameron of Lochiel in the arrival of Bonnie Prince Charlie and his subsequent adventures. After Culloden, 'Gentle Lochiel', in hiding from vengeful Hanoverian troops, watched from the hills as his home was burnt to the ground. The castle ruins remain behind the restored Achnacarry.

Looking back on our visit I have the impression that the current Lochiel should also bear the title of his ancestor, "Gentle Lochiel". We had a most enjoyable day and owe him a huge vote of thanks.

**Jean MacLeod**

## The Drambuie Collection Arrives at the West Highland Museum

Objects from the prestigious Drambuie Collection arrived at the Museum in January 2019. This is an exceptional collection of Jacobite drinking glasses dating from the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The collection is on long term loan to the Museum by kind permission of owners William Grant and Sons. Curator, Andy Fairgrieve personally delivered the glasses to the Museum where they are now on display in the Jacobite Exhibition. The loan was made possible through the generous support of the Government Indemnity Scheme which covers all of our insurance costs.



The glassware display focuses on the secret symbolism of the Jacobites and their use of material culture to show their support and loyalty for the old Stuart dynasty. Highlights of the



glasses on loan to us include: A rare Scottish glass which has an enamelled portrait of Prince Charles Edward Stuart on it, a finger bowl and a firing glass that would be hammered on the table after toasts and the noise would resemble musket fire. These fine objects would have been used by Jacobites to toast their "King over the water" in the hope that one day the Stuart's would return from exile and reclaim the British throne.

In addition to a fine selection of glassware the Jacobite loans also include an exquisite example of a hidden portrait snuff box, along with a piece of the mast of a boat said to have carried the Prince away on his escape from Skye to Loch Nevis.

An official launch was held at the Museum on the evening of 20<sup>th</sup> March to celebrate the arrival of the collection. This was exactly 272 years from the date that the Siege of Fort William by the Jacobites began. Around 50 museum members, volunteers and invited guests gathered for the launch party. Drambuie cocktails were served courtesy of William Grant and Sons, local beer provided thanks to Glen Spean brewery and a delicious buffet prepared by staff and volunteers. Chair of the Board, John Hutchison opened the evening with Gaelic song and a delightful welcome speech. Guests then toured the exhibition at their leisure.

**Vanessa Martin**

*Pictures: Andy Fairgrieve from William Grant and Sons presents the Drambuie Collection to our Curator*

*Yvonne MacCulloch and John MacCulloch from the 1745 Association pictured with Vanessa Martin and volunteer Jo Watson at the Drambuie Collection launch party (Photograph courtesy of Iain Ferguson)*

## Ten facts you (probably) didn't know about the West Highland Museum

### 1 A milestone is within reach

The Museum celebrates its 100<sup>th</sup> birthday in 2022. Descendants of original founders Victor Hodgson and Elizabeth Ryan to this day are directors of the Museum.

### 2 We can print our own currency

A copper plate made by Sir Robert Strange and intended to print currency for the Jacobites was discarded after the Battle of Culloden.

The plate on display was used to print "bank notes" in 1728 to raise funds for the Museum. Prints sold for 10/6 each. In 2019 a print sold for £875 at auction in Edinburgh.

### 3 Royal connections

Queen Elizabeth I of Scotland visited in 1991. She viewed objects associated with her great-great-grandmother including a quach drank from by Queen Victoria and purportedly used by Prince Albert and Bonnie Prince Charlie too. Queen Victoria wrote about the incident in her Highland Diary.



### 4 A room within a room

When the Old Fort was demolished to make way for the West Highland railway, the Governor's room was moved in its entirety to the Museum. It is particularly popular today with Outlander fans.

### 5 Police saved a weapon

A rare 1<sup>st</sup> pattern FS fighting knife in the Commando exhibition was rescued by the Police. Handed in for destruction as part of a knife amnesty, it was spotted by an eagle-eyed officer who gifted it to the Museum.

### 6 Customs officers vandalised an exhibit

An illicit whisky was left on the steps of the Museum by an anonymous donor in 1924. Sadly, it can no longer be used to distil a dram, as the folk from the Department of Customs and Excise punctured holes in it!

### 7 A musical museum

From enchanted bagpipes said to have been played at Bannockburn, to pipes once owned by Bonnie Prince Charlie, to rare examples of the clàrsach. The museum promotes the musical heritage of the Highlands.

### 8 Jacobites are key

The Museum has closely been associated with the Jacobites since its inception staging its first Jacobite Exhibition in 1925. While plenty of museums claim to have relics associated with Bonnie Prince Charlie such as his hair and clothing, it is thought that the Museum is the only one to have a tooth on display!

### 9 It celebrates the Outdoor Capital

As Outdoor Capital of the UK, Fort William has long been associated with outdoor adventure activities. Nowadays the lochs offer some of the best white water canoeing in the country. This is nothing new, with the remains of a dugout boat dating back more than a thousand years in their collection. Situated at the foot of Ben Nevis, the UK's highest mountain, the Museum has a close connection with mountaineering, climbing and the Model T Ford that ascended the Ben in 1911.

### 10 Home to a celebrated Highland collection

The Museum was chosen to care for the renowned Carmichael Collection. Alexander Carmichael (1832 – 1912) was a famous folklorist and antiquarian who collected folklore, local traditions, natural history observations and material objects from people throughout the Scottish Highlands.

**Ron Cameron & Vanessa Martin**

*First published by History Scotland magazine in October*

## Focusing on the Wee Ones!

With the well-deserved retirement of Education Officer Betty Bruce earlier this year, the monthly children's Saturday Club could no longer operate without a volunteer or two to run it.

The Collections and Learning Committee reviewed our children's activities and decided to focus on individual events for children at the Museum. Here are a few things we've been up to this year!

During the Easter holidays we ran a "Kids Easter Chick Trail". Some wee chicks were hidden around the Museum and children were tasked with finding them in order to win a chocolate prize. The event was very popular with visitors.



Betty Bruce returned for one final Saturday Club in October for the Highland Archaeology Festival. An account of her "Dig Through History" event is detailed elsewhere in the newsletter.

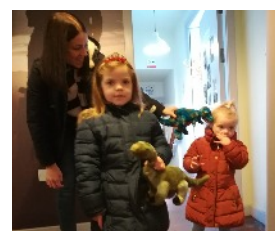


For the October School holidays we repeated the format and set up a "Dinosaur Hunt" in the Museum.

12 wee dinosaurs had escaped around the Museum and children were tasked with finding them in exchange for a prize. The event attracted a lot of attention on social media, bringing in local children to the Museum. Over the course of two weeks more than 200 children participated in the hunt. This was our most popular children's event to date!



We plan to run an "Elf Hunt" over the Christmas holidays and launched this at the Fort William Christmas Gathering on Friday 29<sup>th</sup> November. In addition to children's activities the Museum offered complimentary mulled wine and mince pies to visitors on the night, and provided a 10% shopping discount in the book and gift shop.



## Museum's Bursary Scheme Launched

In 2019 we launched a bursary scheme. We approached all three local high schools in February offering a one day per week placement. These would run for 12 weeks, June to August. A payment of £600 was on offer at the end of the 12 weeks if the bursary conditions had been met. We also received some valuable financial support from a museum member for which we are very grateful.



Melanie Perlaza with Volunteer Co-ordinator Sonja McLachlan

After interviews and references two bursary students were chosen, one covering Wednesday and one covering Friday. The Bursary scheme worked really well for us as we had extra cover for volunteers' holidays during our busiest time of year.

Our interns were Cara Lees and Melanie Perlaza from Lochaber High School. Both did a great job and were quick to learn, enthusiastic and flexible with working days. The scheme gave them both valuable work experience with visitors from all over the world, shop sales, cash handling and multi-tasking in a very busy environment. They were both a pleasure to work with and they both stayed on our volunteers list after their bursary period ended. We are hoping to run the scheme again in 2020.

**Sonja McLachlan**



## A Shift in the Life of a Museum Volunteer

The Museum has had free entry since 2011, relying on donations and shop sales to cover running costs. We have a pool of volunteers, at all times a team of two volunteers operate a morning or afternoon shift. Some volunteers do a regular shift per week while others vary their shift depending on demands from their domestic situation. A few do more than one shift per week!

Why would you want to be an unpaid volunteer? Duties include meeting and greeting our many visitors, facilitating and encouraging shop sales and some general maintenance. Other volunteer jobs include helping with and encouraging school visits bringing life to our various collections. We also guide varying groups. For example, a recent group of visiting European Scouts and an American group on a Scotland Outlander tour.

I enjoy inspiring our many visitors and we have translation sheets in many languages, including Mandarin, to assist guests enjoy their visit. Being a volunteer has a feel-good factor and every shift is different with visitors from around the world and children of all ages – some more interested than others! We have something of interest to many of the nationalities visiting the Museum, for instance the line of our royal family is of interest to the Germans, the Jacobite rebellion was supported by France, Bonnie Prince Charlie and his Cardinal brother both died in Rome. Fort William was named after William of Orange from Holland who, with his wife Mary, were joint sovereigns of the UK at the time of building the Fort.

As a thank you to the volunteers the Museum has organised biannual visits to venues of local historical interest. A couple of years ago we were hosted by Angus McDonald who showed us round his newly restored Roshven House, relating how he transferred the house from a semi ruin into a magnificent home. This year Locheil showed us round an upgraded Achnacarry Castle followed by an enlightening talk on operating his estate in the modern era.

With the Museum, I have also been on a visit to the V&A in Dundee, a guided tour of Culloiden and Perth Museum. Perth was particularly interesting as we were shown round the vast basement storage area of their museum collections.

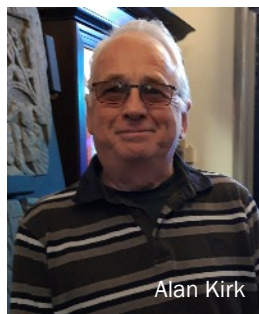
Who are the volunteers? Many of us are of a certain age with free time and welcome the opportunity of giving something back to our local community. We also have students from the High School interested in history. Volunteers are drawn for different reasons. Some are interested in local history; some have previous teaching experience and some are just looking to meet new like-minded people.

Comments from departing visitors: - "Such a Well Organised Museum," "A Very Special Place," "A Treasure Trove," "Unforgettable," "Fabulous" and "Wonderful" makes being a volunteer all worthwhile and provokes a feeling of pride in our Museum and town.

The museum is always looking for volunteers!

Alan Kirk

If you would like to find out more about volunteering, call Sonja at the Museum for a chat on 01397 702169 or email [sonja@westhighlandmuseum.org.uk](mailto:sonja@westhighlandmuseum.org.uk)



## Education Update

We've had a busy year for local primary school visits. Betty Bruce and Jo Godfrey have done a grand job at keeping the students entertained and have covered a wide variety of topics to fit in with the school curriculum. Here are some of the highlights!

- Lundavra School visited in March and November. Jo led the spring session which focused on the Vikings and Betty assisted. Their teacher Mr Ross is always a big supporter of Museum and our education programme.
- In April Banavie School came along to study the Jacobites. They toured the Governor's Room and the Jacobite room and carried out activities. We received excellent feedback for this session from the new headteacher.
- Inverlochry School visited in May and focused on how our grandfathers and grandmothers lived. The education team used handling boxes to show what life was like and the group toured the Highland Life exhibition.
- On a manic Monday morning in June, 50 pupils arrived from Caol. The Museum was already jammed packed with visitors, so it was a bit of a squeeze. The subject for the visit was how the Museum works. It included establishing where artefacts come from and finding out how the Museum is financed. The school returned again with another group of 50 in October.
- In July Lady Lovat School from Morar had toured the Museum as part of their year end celebrations.
- Not only school groups visited. In September, 50 Highland Brownies from as far afield as Skye descended on the Museum. They dressed in our newly acquired Victorian aprons and mop hats and learned to churn butter as part of a look at Victorian life. Betty was ably assisted during her 4-hour Brownie marathon by young volunteer Josh Webber. She was most grateful for his help and touched when the Brownies presented her with a bouquet of flowers.



## The Appin Murder!

The Museum participated in the "Museums at Night Festival" for the very first time on 8<sup>th</sup> November.

20 folk braved icy conditions and came along to hear Iain Rose speak about the Appin Murder by candlelight. (*The images were taken before the lights went out!*)

As Iain told the intriguing tale of the Appin Murder, those in attendance enjoyed a dram of whisky to keep out the cold. They supped on local beer, provided courtesy of Glen Spean brewery and tucked into homemade treats baked by volunteer Jo Godfrey.

A good night was had by all!



## LOOKING FOR SOME ORIGINAL CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEAS?

Why not visit our shop and  
support your local museum!

We have a fantastic selection of books, jewellery,  
glassware and children's gifts for sale.

And, if you're really stuck for ideas  
why not purchase a West Highland  
Museum gift voucher!



## DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**23rd - 31st December 2019** - Children's Elf Hunt and  
Scavenger Hunt.

**Wednesday 8th January 2020** - A night with Dr Hugh Dan  
MacLennan "The Caman & The Calluinn", Moorings  
Hotel, Fort William, 7pm. Tickets £5 from The Museum.

**January 2020** - Temporary exhibition by Liberty  
Aluminium celebrating 90 years of the Lochaber Smelter.

**Summer 2020** - Temporary exhibition to commemorate  
the 80th anniversary of the capture of the 51st Division at  
St. Valery.

**Thursday 28th May 2020** - AGM, 5pm, West Highland  
Museum

## 100 Objects

In 2022 we celebrate the Museum's  
100th birthday and plan to undertake a  
project to identify 100 of the most  
interesting objects in the Museum.

Over the last two months we have asked  
visitors to tell us what their favourite objects  
are. We've had some interesting responses!

To take part, email us and tell us what your  
favourite object is in the Museum.

Email: [info@westhighlandmuseum.org.uk](mailto:info@westhighlandmuseum.org.uk)

### West Highland Museum

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Taigh-tasgaidh na Gaidhealtachd an Iar

Charity No: SC014287



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## ABRACH TRAVEL AGENCY FORT WILLIAM PH33 6AJ

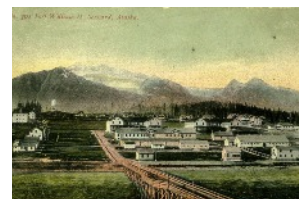
*Take a Round the World Tour  
and always feel at home*  
with your Guide Ian Skinner

**NORTHERN IRELAND** Head west from Glasgow and visit our Celtic  
cousins at **Fort William Park** in North Belfast.

**JAMAICA** Cross the Atlantic to Jamaica and climb to its highest  
point in the west of the island, in **Fort William Estate**, an old sugar  
plantation, and have a swim in the Mayfield Falls.

**USA** Go up to New York State and visit **Fort William Henry** built in  
1755 on the route from New York to Montreal. This was the scene of  
a massacre in 1757 by the French and native Americans on the  
British troops in the Fort. It now contains a museum.

**CANADA** Head further inland to the  
western end of Lake Superior where a  
fur trading post, called **Fort William**,  
was the starting point for a major  
canoe route to western Canada. This  
settlement amalgamated with Port  
Arthur in 1970 and was renamed  
Thunder Bay. It now contains an historic park.



**ALASKA** Travel north west to Haines in the Alaskan Panhandle for  
the next **Fort William**. It is now known as Chilkoot Barracks. During  
the Klondyke Gold Rush 1896 – 1899, it was an important Police  
base for the 100,000 prospectors searching for the elusive gold in the  
Yukon. It now operates as a US army base.

**INDIA** Cross the vast Pacific Ocean  
and head for Kolkata (formerly  
Calcutta) in India. This **Fort William**  
was built in 1696 and was famous for  
its "Black Hole" incident. It is now an  
Indian army operation HQ but also  
served as an important college for  
Oriental languages mainly for the incoming western rulers.



**AUSTRALIA** Australia and New Zealand were popular destinations  
for emigrants from the Highlands in the 1830s. More recently,  
Frankston, south of Melbourne, was the scene of a mini emigration in  
the 1950s from over 14 local families and the town is known as  
"Little Fort William".

**ANTARCTICA** Now for the  
highlight of the trip to one of  
the remotest parts of the earth.  
This involves extensive flights  
to get to the Falkland Islands  
and then flying over **Fort  
William Point** – a conspicuous  
flat-topped rocky headland on Robert Island, part of the South  
Shetland Islands. The point, now a lighthouse, was named by sealers  
in the 19th Century as a prominent landmark when entering the  
dangerous English Strait.



**EIRE** After this exhilarating trip, have a luxury break at the **Fort  
William Manor House** (built 1870) in Waterford, Ireland before  
arriving home (having never left it!).