



TAIGH-TASGAIDH NA GAIDHEALTACHD AN IAR

## NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2021

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West Highland Museum

### Message from the Chairman

What an extraordinary year in which to complete our first century. Covid continues to confound. We emerged from the lockdown with fewer volunteers which left us only able to open 4 days a week on limited hours. This significantly affected our income, but not the visitor experience or our enthusiasm. The visitors remain delighted and gradually volunteers returned to the fray, including a handful of new faces.

After ten years in the saddle, Colleen Barker has decided to step back as the manager of our museum. With a keen eye for numbers, a hand on every financial opportunity and a wonderful personality that inspires and motivates, Colleen has been key to the museum's extraordinary success in this period. This has been a period of enormous change as the new Trust was established, no 40 purchased and the change to free admission leading to dramatic increase in visitor numbers. Colleen will stay in touch as a volunteer and is helping on various particular projects, fitted in between many a long deserved walking holiday. Our Curator, Vanessa Martin has been appointed as our Curator manager and we have recruited Norman Bell in a new part time role as administrator. These are exciting appointments and with Sonja managing the volunteers and shop for this year, we have a great team in place.

More and more, the dynamism of the museum lies beyond the physical walls of our museum and the limitations of lockdown really illustrated this. Our champion, Paul Murton hosted the '100 Objects' event online attended by hundreds from all over the world. It proved an excellent way of projecting our academic authority as well as promoting the collection to folk as far away as Palm Springs and Auckland. The publication of a limited selection of Jacobite bank notes produced by the Edinburgh Printmakers using our Robert Strange printing plate again attracted attention worldwide, with an excellent discussion held online about the artist, the cause and the history of bank notes in the mid 18th Century. All this attention generated exceptional income of £33,000 which provides a great base for our centenary fund. Our close relationship with St Andrews University has considerably enhanced our digital capabilities as well as attracting international attention. Finally our social media and online initiatives including podcasts and films are growing daily with 3,700 fans following the Facebook page alone. Enormous credit must be given to Vanessa for driving this programme.

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### Message from the Manager

*After a decade of dedicated service to the museum, our Museum Manager, Colleen Barker, retires on 31 December. She plans to spend more time globe-trotting and exploring new places. Here she reflects on her time at the museum; ten highlights (and perhaps some lowlights) to represent 10 years.*



#### **My ten most memorable moments as Museum Manager of West Highland Museum;**

1. Getting the job! 56 applicants and I came second, but lucky for me the first applicant decided not to relocate to Fort William. So, in January 2012 I started as museum manager and have really enjoyed the last 10 years in my role.
2. Helping Richard Sidgwick (Chair of Trustees) and Sally Archibald (retired Curator) unblock the customer toilet! A visitor had managed to get the toilet brush stuck up the U-bend and with rubber gloves on I tried to free the brush, the toilet waste came over the gloves! Sally eventually freed the brush.
3. To the workmen's amusement, we discovered the new concrete sofa installed in Cameron Square matched my blue hair. I made the front cover of the local newspaper.
4. Being invited to the Queen's Garden Party at Holyroodhouse in 2017 and getting to take my Dad with me as a guest. It was a very cold day but we had a really nice time.



Continued on page 2

whm  
West Highland Museum

### Message from Chairman continued...

Back at our analogue base the activity has never stopped. The V&A in Dundee have been exploring our tartan collection to include in a new exhibition. The Beetlewing dress continues to attract coverage. Flora MacDonald's tartan has raised questions, and excited controversy in the national press and wonderful new finds are still rolling into our collection.

In 2022 we head into our second century and we are getting the museum prepared for this responsibility. The main event will be an exhibition of Jacobite portraits primarily from the Pininski collection in Poland. An energetic crowdfunding exercise raised far more than the needed £25,000 in a tense 30 day period and this sets us fair to launch the show in August 2022. With so much generosity shown by local supporters and businesses, we are sure to have a lively launch and a well visited exhibition. Importantly this fundraising process illustrated how many people see the importance of our museum as the cultural centre of Lochaber.

As the owners of No 40 the High Street, it has been our plan to develop a shop in that space and thus provide access through and from the museum to the High Street as well as generating financial benefit from the trading activities. There is ever increasing demand for better access for wheel chair users and improved visitor facilities. The staff and volunteer facilities need to be upgraded to suit our current and future needs. Storage needs to suit the demands and responsibilities of an important collection. Temporary exhibitions need to be hosted in a suitable compelling context and perhaps most importantly our educational projects need to be hosted and delivered in an appropriate place. Given these demands we have commissioned a heritage consultancy called Bright Design to assess the visitor flow and exhibition opportunities and we have commissioned Helen Lucas Architects to establish how we deliver all these ambitions for the museum. Key to the project will be an understanding and sympathy for the current strengths of the museum. It is vital that we listen to the visitors and the volunteers when they describe what they like about our museum today and that any developments reflect these virtues. The design team have worked hard on this project and we should see the feasibility study costed and completed by the summer.

The travails of the Covid lockdowns have given us time to take stock and prepare for better times. We do not expect a return to the visitor numbers and the income of 2019 until we get foreign visitors back and that may be a couple of years yet. This really allows us to plan to make a real investment in a museum to suit the next century. We are making a start. We have a great team and a clear vision. But what shoulders we stand on! What inspiration and effort it took Victor Hodgson to get the show on the road back in 1922 and what a success it has been.

**Ian Peter MacDonald**

### Message from Manager continued...

5. Organising two charity dinners on behalf of the museum and raising over £10,000 at each one.
6. Managing to burn my toast and set off the smoke alarms. The museum had to be evacuated and to my great embarrassment the fire brigade arrived. While trying to clear the smoke from the office I managed to blow a cheque from a member that was sitting on my desk on to the roof. After climbing onto the flat roof, I managed to retrieve it.
7. Working with a wonderful bunch of volunteers and board members.
8. I loved the sound of the children going round the museum during school visits especially the younger ones.
9. Managing to get a grant to cover all the costs of getting the museum safe to reopen after the first lockdown. We have enough cleaning material to last at least five years!
10. After a health scare this year, I have decided to resign as manager of the museum. I am going to be going on many holidays. I will still be involved with the museum but on a voluntary basis. They cannot get rid of me that easily!

**Colleen Barker**



## Website Upgrade

With the museum closed for significant periods in 2020 and 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it became imperative for the museum to improve its online content. Objective Software Services Ltd (OSS) had already been commissioned to replace the museum's existing website, and the new site went live in 2021. OSS Ltd's owner, Jim McLachlan, has done a marvellous job making our website more

visitor friendly and provided administrative training and access to ensure staff are able to update content regularly.

Our homepage is more inviting, with a fresh, modern look, and it offers users the opportunity to browse much more detailed content throughout the site. A blog and podcast have been created, so visitors can read or listen to a variety of stories about local history and objects at the museum. Staff are now able to upload content easily themselves and can keep the site up-to-date using the News and Events section.

Links have been added to give direct access to our 100 Objects website and eHive which enable visitors to browse parts of our collections online. For those planning to visit the museum, there is much more detailed information on offer, including access to our guide book in nine different languages.

An online shop is in development and will be up and running in 2022.

To explore our website visit:  
[www.westhighlandmuseum.org.uk](http://www.westhighlandmuseum.org.uk)



## Curator's Update

2021 has been another odd year at the museum. I was part furloughed for the first few months of the year while the museum was closed, working from home and focusing on digital engagement with visitors online. In 2020 we formed a partnership with the Open Virtual Worlds team at the University of St Andrews and I spent time a lot of time working with them to develop our 100 Objects gallery. The gallery was launched in February and has been popular with general visitors and for study with schools and UHI (University of the Highlands and Islands) utilising the resource.

Two other major projects consumed much of my time this year, both of which are mentioned in articles in this newsletter: The Strange Plate project and the Return of the Stuarts exhibition. The former has now finished and has created new objects for our collection and raised £30,000 for the museum while the second project will come to fruition in August 2022 as part of our centenary celebrations.

On the curatorial side I would like to thank the many volunteers who have assisted with curatorial work throughout the year, to name a few: Neil MacLeod for assisting with video and photography for our 100 Objects digital gallery, Angus Dunn for helping with the fossils project, David MacFarlane and Kenny Mackintosh for helping with DIY at the museum, Jo Watson who curated our beetle wing dress exhibition, and to Chris Robinson and Caroline Gooch for being an integral part of the team that has worked on the Strange Plate and Return of the Stuarts projects. All in all, it's been another challenging year for the museum, but also a fantastic opportunity to engage with new audiences, and to develop the museum's reputation, collection, and its exhibition spaces.

**Vanessa Martin**



## Staff Restructure

As the result of Colleen's departure as member of staff at the end of this year, the Board decided a staff restructure would be appropriate. We are grateful that Colleen plans to continue working with us as a volunteer. Sonja McLachlan will continue in her existing role as part-time Volunteer Co-ordinator and Shop Manager. Curator, Vanessa Martin, has been appointed full-time Curator Manager and will take on overall responsibility for the running of the museum while combining this with her existing curatorial role.

The museum is pleased to welcome Norman Bell to the team who started as our new part-time Museum Administrator on 15th November 2021. Norman has a strong administration and accountancy background from his time in the armed forces; he served with the Army from 1988 to 2010 and then went on to serve as an accountant in the Civil Service from 2010 to 2014. He then turned his hand as a civilian to Logistic, Production and Retail management in Germany, returning to the UK in February 2020 and transferring his skillset to the hospitality industry as a Deputy General Manager of a busy hotel until joining the team at the West Highland Museum here in Fort William.



Norman Bell, Sonja McLachlan & Vanessa Martin



**Contact the museum team for more information:  
[info@westhighlandmuseum.org.uk](mailto:info@westhighlandmuseum.org.uk)**

As the result of the COVID-19 pandemic the museum has been closed to visitors for a significant period in 2021. We rely on shop sales and visitor donations to cover our operational costs.

We appreciate that times are tough for everyone, but if you are able to help us in any way we would be pleased to hear from you.

How you can help:

- **Encourage friends and family to become museum members or associate members**
- **Gift a membership to someone**
- **Sponsor a display case or object from our collection**
- **Consider a one-off donation using the red 'donate' button on our website**



# Volunteers Awarded the Queen's Award for Voluntary Service

The Museum was proud to announce in June that our volunteers received well deserved recognition for all their hard work. They were awarded the prestigious Queen's Award for Voluntary Service, the highest award given to charitable organisations. It is the equivalent of an MBE for volunteering.



Volunteers have been at the heart of West Highland Museum activities since it was founded almost 100 years ago. However, over the past decade volunteers have made an even more important contribution to the running of the museum when free entry to the museum was introduced in 2011 to increase visitor engagement. Over this period our visitor numbers rose from 9,000 – 60,800. Volunteers have been at the heart of our success and deliver core services at every level of the museum operations, from greeting visitors, to governance, to assisting with curation, DIY, and providing learning activities.

Ian Peter Macdonald, Chair of the Board of the West Highland Museum Trust said "The West Highland Museum are delighted that the value of their volunteers has been recognised for a Queen's Award for Voluntary Service. The volunteers who support our museum range from board members to acknowledged experts who give their time and intellect freely. The bulk of our volunteers are local enthusiasts who welcome the visitor to the museum with pride, knowledge and a generous smile. The museum provides a stimulating activity for an often retired community where they enjoy their companionship with their colleagues, enjoy engaging with the visitor and where they can enjoy learning a little more every day."

Coinciding with Volunteers' Week, the Queen's Award recognises that volunteers have been vital throughout the coronavirus pandemic, and will continue to be as the country emerges from lockdown. Volunteers' Week is an annual celebration for the UK to recognise those who have dedicated their time to support their local community, both through the pandemic, and over many years.

The Queen's Award for Voluntary Service Independent Committee Chair Sir Martyn Lewis, said the awards "highlight the growing and key role which volunteers are playing in times of rapid change and unprecedented challenges. Whether driven by a neighbourly passion to help others or to achieve that well recognised "high" of personal satisfaction, volunteering taps into a rich spirit of generosity, ingenuity and kindness. The Queen's



Vanessa Martin, Sonja McLachlan and Donald Cameron of Lochiel

Right: Queen's Award Voluntary Service award

Award's judges are proud to honour the achievements of those who help to make our country great."

On 26 July 2021, volunteers past and present gathered in Cameron Square for a reception to celebrate this great achievement. Donald Cameron of Lochiel presented Sonja McLachlan, our Volunteer Co-ordinator, with the award and a certificate on behalf of The Queen. Those gathered enjoyed coffee and a special celebratory cake, made by Tanya Warner of Farmstead Fayre.



Volunteers past and present gather in Cameron Square

Pictures - Iain Ferguson: The Write Image



# 2022 is the 100th Birthday of the West Highland Museum!

## Would you believe it?

We will be celebrating this achievement (amongst other things) with a major exhibition of Stuart paintings imported especially from Europe for a three-month Exhibition opening in August.

But back to our origins – it was a series of Summer Exhibitions of dyeing and weaving, weapons and autographs which was our foundation from 1922 to 1924. In 1925 a major exhibition of “Prince Charles Edward and the ‘45 campaign” brought together a collection of Jacobite relics, medals, paintings, documents, maps and books, and first raised the profile of the museum on the National Stage.

The Museum was the brainchild of Victor Hodgson of Culilcheanna, Onich, whose family are still actively involved in supporting the museum. One of the first items in the collection was “The Secret Portrait” which he found in a London junkshop. It’s still one of the prize pieces in the collection and has been loaned for exhibitions in Paris and Amsterdam over the years. In 1928 The Strange Plate, a copper plate commissioned by Bonnie Prince Charlie in 1746 to print banknotes to pay his army, was purchased at auction.

After Hodgson’s untimely death in 1929 there were some difficult years. The museum attempted to purchase the British Linen Bank Building for £1,000 but could only raise half the money and so a crippling mortgage gave concern for many years. Donations from the Carnegie Trust helped but there are repeated comments in the Annual Reports that the Town Council gave no support whatever!

But other ingenious schemes kept the museum going including annual dances which sometimes made a profit and sometimes didn’t. Then fund raising dinners and even a lady’s football match in 1954 which raised £10!

The footfall was slowly increasing year by year with a policy of a low entry fee until WWII when the most valuable items were locked away and the first floor became the Royal Navy Officers Mess for four years.



Poster for the 1925 exhibition



1925 exhibition catalogue



Museum founder, Victor Hodgson



The Secret Portrait, an anamorphic painting. A portrait of Bonnie Prince Charlie is revealed when viewed through a cylinder.

The museum building dates from about 1850 and keeping it habitable was a constant struggle. Four stoves were bought in 1937 and eventually central heating installed in 1950. As an old building, there were problems with damp, subsidence, and dry rot needing regular attention but were finally addressed in a major redevelopment in 1996/7 with a new roof, staircase, exhibition cases and exhibition.

There had once been a proposal from a local estate agent to buy over the museum, “because it was a valuable property”, and move it to the redundant fever hospital close to the original Belford Hospital. This was fortunately fended off as was a proposal to demolish the upper part of the museum to allow a new relief road at the back of the town!

Footfall increased steadily over the years but dipped in some years, put down to petrol rationing in the early fifties, and in 1964 to the typhoid outbreak in Aberdeen! Visitor numbers peaked in the early seventies with busy tourist seasons - but decreased thereafter as package holidays abroad drew visitors to the sunny south. School visits and the Saturday club for children became a regular feature and we had a visit from the Queen and even a Māori chieftainess.

The museum’s 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary was marked with the purchase of a new typewriter, but the memorable anniversary was the 75<sup>th</sup> in 1997 when the major refurbishment was completed, and the museum reopened to our visitors. That evening the town turned out in vast numbers, estimated at 3,000, to dance “The Longest Strip the Willow in the West”. Dancers stretched from the Grand Hotel to the Royal Bank with Lochaber Pipe band and the High School band leading off the crowds to line the street. An evening of traditional music followed played from the dais of Peter Donald’s grocery van drawn up at the top of Cameron Square. One local dignitary announced that “This is the best band that has played in this square for 100 years”, whilst two young Japanese girls visiting the town asked, “is it like this every night in Fort William?”

However, despite the major redevelopment and the display which was praised from the heights – the Rough Guide described us as “splendidly idiosyncratic” - the number of visitors dwindled to less than 10,000 annually. And so, with much trepidation, in 2011 the museum took the bold step of offering free entry to visitors, to rely on donations and income from an enlarged shop. This necessitated the difficult task of making our paid reception staff redundant and appealing to the town for volunteers to support the museum. And the town responded splendidly! Our footfall increased year by year, until in 2019 we saw more than 60,000 visitors – a figure not seen for 50 years!

With that there was a buzz about the museum again. The Model T Ford that had been carried in bits to the top of Ben Nevis was displayed on the first floor, leading directly to the casting of the Bronze Ford in Cameron Square and the tyre tracks which lead from the Museum. In 2012, with encouragement from the Commando Veterans Association, an exhibition of Commando Training was opened in the Education Room with some 250 commandos and their families crowding the building.

But now as we begin to recover after our enforced COVID closure, a whole new life is anticipated for the museum. We will shortly be sharing our plans with the community to extend the museum onto the High Street with a shop entrance and the redevelopment of the barn at the back of the building to increase exhibition, storage, staff, much needed educational and research facilities for our 100 + Anniversary. It will allow us to tell many more stories and continue to fulfil the ambition of Victor Hodgson that we will be a museum second to none in Scotland!

Chris Robinson

# Strange Plate Project

## Raises £30,000

The museum made history in April 2021 and printed from the Strange Plate for the first time in almost a century. The project was delivered as part of the museum's centenary celebrations and twenty-two prints were printed by Alastair Clark of Edinburgh Printmakers. Print 1/22 was auctioned at Lyon and Turnbull in Edinburgh on 18 August, the sale price exceeded our wildest expectations and sold for £6,250. This very special print was unique in that it was framed in beechwood sourced from the famous Beech Avenue at Achnacarry, the seat of Clan Cameron.

In 1745 as Bonnie Prince Charlie arrived to raise his standard at Glenfinnan, Cameron of Lochiel was in the midst of planting saplings for an avenue of Beech trees on his Achnacarry estate. He left these bunched closely together and never returned to space them as he died in exile in Europe in 1747. These trees are now at the end of their natural lifespan and are in decline. Some of this wood has been kindly gifted to us by our President, the current Cameron of Lochiel. It has been milled and fashioned by master cabinet maker Peter Davis in his workshop in Fort William. Further prints were sold and raffled in September and in total £30,000 was raised towards the museum's fundraising efforts to expand the museum in its second century.

The plate has an interesting history. On the eve of the Battle of Culloden in April 1746, Prince Charles Edward Stuart entrusted engraver Robert Strange with the task of designing banknotes to pay the Jacobite Army. Strange commissioned a local coppersmith to construct the plate and then etched his design on it. It was never used because the Battle of Culloden took place and the Jacobite Army dispersed. The plate then disappears from history for 90 years until it was discovered close to the ford on the River Spean. Bonnie Prince Charlie had crossed and recrossed that ford in August 1746 during his flight through the heather; historians can only assume that it was lost from his baggage about that time. The plate then came into the possession of the family of General Hugh Ross of Glenmoidart and was then gifted to Cluny Macpherson just before the general's death in 1864. It first reached public notice in an academic article in 1864 and, probably around 1909, a handful of prints were made from the plate by the Jacobite scholar Walter Biggar Blaikie. The museum has recently rediscovered one of these prints in its collection.

The museum acquired the printing plate at the sale of Cluny's effects in London in 1928. The Scottish artist, Sir D. Y. Cameron, was instrumental in raising funds to purchase the plate and he printed 55 numbered and signed prints in 1928.



*Strange Plate print, 2021 (1/22) (Image: Lyon & Turnbull)*



*Strange Plate close up (Image: Alex Gillespie)*

These prints were sold for 10/6 to raise funds for our fledgling museum which had only been in our Cameron Square premises two years at this date. The plates were not printed from again until 2021 and will not be printed from again this century. Number 22/22 has also been framed in Achnacarry beechwood and hangs in the Jacobite Gallery adjacent to the Strange Plate and one of Cameron's prints.

Curator Vanessa Martin has written a booklet focusing on the project and the history of the Strange Plate. Titled "Bonnie Prince Charlie's Jacobite Banknotes", it can be purchased from the museum shop for £4.95, or ordered by telephone or email (01397 702169 / [info@westhighlandmuseum.org.uk](mailto:info@westhighlandmuseum.org.uk)) to be posted. All proceeds will support the museum.

**Vanessa Martin & Chris Robinson**

*The Strange Plate*



# 100 Objects Gallery Launched

The 100 Objects project was conceived in 2019 and was originally intended to showcase 100 of the West Highland Museum's most popular objects in a book to celebrate the organisation's centenary. We asked visitors, volunteers, and members to identify their favourite objects in the museum.



As the result of the COVID-19 pandemic, plans changed and over the summer of 2020 Colleen Barker and Vanessa Martin attended a series of webinars, delivered by the University of Andrew's Open Virtual Worlds' team, focusing on digital engagement with audiences during the pandemic. During one webinar Colleen mentioned the 100 objects project to Dr Alan Miller from the Open Virtual Worlds team and he expressed an interest in creating an online digital gallery to showcase our objects to wider audiences beyond the boundaries of the museum walls. The immediate benefits to the museum of a partnership with the University were to utilise their expertise to digitise our objects and create an openly accessible archive. There was an immediate need to engage with visitors online while the museum was closed for the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is also a long-term goal to make our collections more accessible to the public.

The Open Virtual Worlds team were responsible for sourcing finance for the project, creating the website, uploading core content to the gallery, and developing interactive digital systems to support the display of exhibits. The West Highland Museum team were tasked with identifying objects for inclusion in the gallery, providing information and narratives for the objects. Vanessa Martin worked with photographers Neil MacLeod and Alex Gillespie to deliver the first phase of the project.

The museum and University of St Andrews hosted a successful gallery launch event on 9 February 2021. "The Grand Tour of the West Highland Museum in 100 Objects" was a countdown of the 100 objects in the gallery. The event was free to access and 440 registered to attended the event on Zoom from around the globe, it was also broadcast live on Facebook and introduced by the BBC's Paul Murton. A multitude of speakers took part from museums,



The University of St Andrews' Catherine Cassidy photographing objects, August 2021



## University of St Andrews

media, and academia. This event was followed up on 15 July 2021 with another focusing on Jacobite objects associated with the Strange Plate to promote the sale in August/September of prints from our Strange Plate. Again, this event attracted a worldwide audience and speakers joined the event from New Zealand and England.

The gallery is being developed further, and in August 2021 the St Andrews team were finally able to travel to Fort William to work on 3D reconstructions of some of the 100 objects. Audio and video content are also being uploaded to enrich the gallery. The 100 Objects gallery can be accessed directly through [www.whm100.org](http://www.whm100.org) or via the museum's website <https://www.westhighlandmuseum.org.uk/> (using the 'Education/Research' tab).



100 Objects gallery homepage

A child's Highland outfit featured in the Victorian section of the 100 Objects gallery (Image: Alex Gillespie)



# Highland Threads

The West Highland Museum has contributed to Highland Threads, a virtual exhibition developed in partnership with other museums across the Highlands. Here, project co-ordinator, Nicola Henderson tells us more about the project.



'Highland Threads' was conceived at a Highland Heritage Café, a regular online meet-up during COVID-19 for museums across the Highlands to share ideas and discuss issues they were facing as a sector. Discussions around the impact of COVID-19, led to plans by 14 museums and heritage centres for a joint online exhibition focusing on clothing through the ages, where each museum would focus on a costume from their collection. The collective vision for the project was to use collections to support museums in these difficult times: driving new and existing audiences to the museums whether they were open or closed; help museums find new ways of creating income streams; and, increase access and engagement with collections.

By employing innovative digital technologies and working with sector professionals, 'Highland Threads' reflects the quality of museums and diverse collections that can be found across the Highlands. The digital exhibition launched on 1 April 2021 and can be found at [www.highlandthreads.co.uk](http://www.highlandthreads.co.uk). The physical exhibition has also now launched with 12 of the 14 museums able to put their costume on display for visitors to create their own Highland Threads tour.

**Nicola Henderson**  
**Museums and Heritage Highland**

The West Highland Museum's beetle wing dress is featured in the gallery. To find out more about our fabulous dress visit the online exhibition. Our physical exhibition can be visited in our temporary exhibition space until Spring 2021 and has been curated by dress historian and UHI postgraduate, Jo Watson.



Beetle wing dress  
(Image: Jim Dunn)

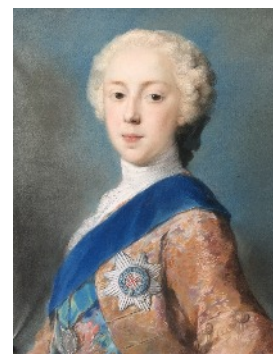
## The Return of the Stuarts in 2022

We have been offered exclusive access to a private collection of paintings owned by the Pininski Foundation, Liechtenstein. The exhibition will include paintings of four generations of the Royal House of Stuart, including James VIII (the Old Pretender) and his wife Princess Clementina Sobieska, through to Prince Charles Edward Stuart, better known as Bonnie Prince Charlie, and his daughter, Charlotte the Duchess of Albany. The series of paintings ends with Charlotte's daughter Princess Marie Victorie de Rohan. These paintings illustrate the family which inspired Jacobites to risk so much to pursue this 'affair of the heart'.

The museum will now be able to deliver a three-month exhibition thanks to the support of museum members, corporate donors, clan/Jacobite organisations, and the general public. We have been overwhelmed by the results of our October crowdfunding campaign with Art Happens and have exceeded our £25,000 target. We are thankful that broadcaster and Historian Paul Murton, from the BBC Scotland's Grand Tours of Scotland series, backed our campaign and kindly hosted our campaign video. Our Board Chair, Ian Peter MacDonald, said "We have reached our target thanks to the assistance of local people and businesses who contributed to our campaign. This support recognises that the museum is at the heart of the local community."

The planned exhibition will also include the recently rediscovered portrait of a 16-year-old Bonnie Prince Charlie, by renowned Venetian artist Rosalba Carriera. It is believed to be the only portrait of the Prince that pre-dates the 1745 Jacobite Rising. The painting was first publicly displayed for a month at the National Museum of Scotland in 2019. This will be a rare opportunity to see these paintings and to hear the story of the exiled Jacobites.

The exhibition is scheduled to open to the public on 18 August 2021, to coincide with the anniversary of the Rising of the Standard and Glenfinnan. Art Historians Peter Pininski and Professor Edward Corp will be in Fort William for the opening week delivering lectures and tours of the exhibition.



Prince Charles Edward Stuart,  
by Rosalba Carriera,  
Venice 1737



Princess Clementina Sobieska,  
by William Mosman,  
Rome 1733, after the lost  
original by Francesco  
Trevisani, Rome 1719

Art Happens

#ReturnOfTheStuarts

Bring Bonnie Prince Charlie Home!



Art Fund



## Funding for our Fossils

During early 2020 the museum participated in the John Ellerman Fossil Review and the related consultation on Natural Science collections in Scotland. Project Curator, Sue Beardmore, from National Museums Scotland, visited the museum to assess our fossil collection. However, due to Covid-19 restrictions, not all planned project work could go ahead and some funding was released to individual museums to invest in improving engagement with their fossil collections. The museum successfully applied for funding and was awarded a generous grant of £700 to reinterpret our in-gallery display in Room 3 and upload the fossils onto a digital gallery where the collection could be viewed by online audiences.



Paleontologist Lucy Muir was appointed to review our collection and produce written interpretation. She was able to work remotely during the COVID-19 lockdown as she is familiar with our fossil collection. Our 2021 intern Angus Dunn was a great help identifying images for the display panel and helping our curator update the fossil exhibition in August. Angus is now away studying Paleontology at Edinburgh University and is a keen fossil hunter himself. He has kindly loaned the museum objects from his personal collection which are now on display in the gallery. Our Director, Neil MacLeod, used his photography expertise to produce fantastic images of our fossils. These are featured in an online gallery on eHive, where parts of our collection are more widely available to online audiences.

eHive can be accessed via the museum's website:

<https://www.westhighlandmuseum.org.uk/>

(Education/Research / Explore the Collection).

Or, directly on eHive:

<https://ehive.com/collections/6174/west-highland-museum>



An ammonite and gryphaea photographed for the online gallery (Images: Neil MacLeod)



Angus Dunn rearranging our fossil display

## Mesolithic Harpoon found 50 years ago handed in to Museum



Vanessa Martin & Fiona Bowie (Image: Iain Ferguson)

Twelve-year-old Fiona Bowie unexpectedly stumbled across an interesting object when she was strolling along the beach with her family at the Back of Keppoch in August 1971. She was unable to hand it over to anyone, so took it home to England where it remained in her possession for 50 years.

In early 2020 she contacted the museum with a view to returning the harpoon to Scotland. The COVID-19 pandemic prevented Fiona travelling to Scotland, but with photographs and the aid of experts at National Museum Scotland, our Curator was able to positively identify her find as a Mesolithic harpoon, which was possibly used for catching fish.

In September 2021, Fiona delivered the harpoon to the museum with a view to donate it to us. We would love to accept the harpoon in to our collection immediately, but Treasure Trove rules in Scotland mean that it has to be reported as a find to the Treasure Trove Unit in Edinburgh. The Unit will assess the object and where appropriate explore the find spot. We hope that the harpoon will eventually be allocated to us in due course. The harpoon remains in the care of the museum while Treasure Trove procedures are completed and can be seen on display in Room 4 with our Mesolithic, Neolithic, and Bronze Age displays.

Vanessa Martin

## Obituary: Jean Kennedy

*We are sad to note the passing of one of our valued volunteers. For almost a decade Jean Kennedy was part of the West Highland Museum team. She passed away peacefully at home on 7th November 2021. Morag MacNeill pays tribute to her dear friend.*



"Like so many other people I have known Jean for many years through old time dancing, or Scottish country dancing. Jean joined the team of volunteers at the museum in April 2011 and in that same year I too became a volunteer and we formed a partnership – every second Friday afternoon – which lasted until the museum had to close because of Covid and the restrictions imposed on public buildings. She did not return to the museum when it re-opened as she had become unwell and was receiving treatment. Jean was always very positive and enjoyed a good chat and this continued when we met on a few occasions during her illness, whether outside for coffee or latterly in her home. It was a good partnership every second Friday afternoon in the Fort William museum."



# Spirit of the Highlands

Dear West Highland Museum friends,

I have been asked to write a quick update for you about what is going on with my textile and women's history project at the moment which has been inspired by the collection at the museum.

As you may have seen in the press earlier in the year, we found in the museum's store what could well be a piece of Flora Macdonald's wedding dress tartan. This piece, which measures 15" x 17", and was cut from a much larger piece some time after the 1938 Empire Exhibition in Glasgow. Originally the piece was 23" wide, which is quite a standard size for a mid-18th century tartan (Flora married in 1750) and was woven with some very finely spun yarn. Samples of the threads were taken in November 2021, and they have gone to the labs at Edinburgh University this week for dye analysis by PhD student Edith Sandstrom, who is one of Professor Alison Hulme's research students and who is championing advances in textile dye analysis. Edith and I will be working together on publishing an academic paper next year on what we find, which will build on the excellent work done by Professor Hugh Cheape and his former colleague Dr Anita Quye about twenty years ago now. I am hoping that we may well analyse the dyes of more of the hard tartans which have not yet been analysed; this is something to be confirmed next year.

I have been successful in getting a grant from the Spirit of the Highlands *Spirit* 360 creative project to recreate Flora's tartan and to make a mid-18th century replica dress from it. I had originally asked industrial weaver Robin Elliot to weave this replica tartan, however it soon became clear that he would not be able to do an accurate replica due to the very high ends per inch of the original tartan, so I went on a search for a handweaver who could complete the task required. Master handweaver Ashleigh Slater, who is the Postgraduate Student of the Year 2020 at the University of the Highlands and Islands, has very kindly agreed to weave the tartan for me. We will actually be weaving two different pieces of tartan; one from commercially-spun and dyed yarn which will be used to make a dress, and another from yarn which I will spin myself and dye with natural dyes. We plan to do this early next year once we have done research into eighteenth century weaving – Ashleigh says it is rather different from how he was taught during his apprenticeship - which we will then publish as a joint paper, or perhaps in the same paper with Edith.

The first dress will then be sewn by me, by hand, according to estimates I have made about Flora's size, and will be available for photography and display. I will then make a second dress, which is inspired entirely by Allan Ramsay's famous 1749 portrait of Flora and will be made for a modern lady. This second outfit will then be auctioned with the proceeds going to the museum.

**Jo Watson**  
University of Highlands and Islands  
Postgraduate researcher

I plan to use a combination of two paintings of Flora wearing tartan dresses as inspiration.

Based on the estimates I have been able to take from a photograph of Flora's stays (corset) at Dunvegan Castle, I estimate that she had an approximate chest size of about 34" in the 1770s-1780s (after having seven children). I think it is quite possible that her chest size at the time of her marriage in 1750 was between 30-32". Johnson described her of being of average height when he met her in 1773, but Boswell said she was shorter than average. The average female height at this time was 5ft 1 ¾. I have therefore estimated a height of 5ft and am using a 32" chest size.



Portrait of Flora MacDonald by William Robertson



Jo Watson and weaver Robin Elliot examine tartan, July 2021



# My Blarmacfoldach School Days

Deep in my memories is the love for our little school in the country which at the time of me attending only had four pupils. My sister Margaret and I, Colin MacDonald and Angus Cameron. It was an old building with just one classroom and I can still feel the warmth as we walked in every morning after walking the mile or so up the road our faces were fresh and bright red from the wind, our hair tousled even although our mother had swept it back into tight pigtails. In the winter, there was always a roaring fire and I could smell the burning peat. Peeling off our coats and wellies in the porch we would run into the classroom, full of anticipation and excitement.

We were always warmly welcomed by our teacher, Mrs Beaton who came from the town every day by car. She was a really pretty lady who you could describe nowadays as perhaps a cross between Ma Broon and Miss Jean Brodie. She wore her hair in a tight bun at the back of her head and everyone described it as ginger but I thought it was golden, a beautiful flaxen colour which reminded me of the corn stacked up in our fields. She wore pastel coloured wool jumpers and a long tweed skirt with lace up brogue shoes that made a clicking noise on the wooden floor. Her skirt was always the same and I often wondered if she just had the one or if that was her 'school' skirt. She had a gentle voice and a warm friendly smile and I would eagerly get seated at my desk ready to begin lessons. I hung on to every word she said, my eyes rarely leaving her face and when I was asked a question I felt like the most important person in the world. She loved listening to our stories and always said although she was providing us with education, we were educating her about life in the country.

The classroom had a high roof and a steep wooden stair leading up to where the teacher would stay if there was heavy snow and our road was closed. If I was asked to go upstairs to get something, I would look around with wide open eyes staring at the pretty rosebud sheets on the bed and the large comfy easy chairs. I would always be tempted to sneak in and pull the long chain on the toilet and watch the water swirling down the bowl, I was too scared though in case it made a loud noise and everyone would hear it. Our school toilets were in a corrugated iron building outside so just imagine an inside toilet that flushed. At break time, we would have milk and jam sandwiches or pieces as we called them, at our desks and Mrs Beaton would make fresh coffee for herself. It had the most amazing smell that wafted round the

room and stayed there the whole day. She would have cream crackers and thick cheese and sometimes I must admit they looked much more appetising than my jam piece. To this day every time I smell coffee it reminds me of my school days

Every day I skipped up that road with my sister and I was almost disappointed on a Friday as there would be no school for two days. I was just so happy, we played together, we laughed, we learnt to skip using a huge long rope which we also made a good tree swing. We sang and listened to the radio on wet days, we held hands on nature walks stopping to admire the beauty, finding wild flowers for a scrapbook and taking a genuine interest in what each other had found even if it was just a funny shaped stone.

Then my world was to be turned upside down. We began having visitors to our little school, two very stern-faced men in suits and crisp white shirts and ties came to see the teacher and our parents at least once a week. The older pupils who claimed to know everything said they were inspectors and I frowned every time I saw them as I hated their intrusion.

A few months later, Mrs Beaton, with tears in her eyes gathered all four of us around her and explained they were closing the school, we would be picked up in a car and taken to town. I couldn't believe it, travelling every day in a smelly vehicle instead of feeling the wind and sun on our faces when we walked. We would be going to a big school with lots of people we didn't know and being a shy child, this

was my idea of torture. I cried myself to sleep and sulked for weeks but like it or not it was happening.

A ceilidh was arranged to say goodbye to our teacher and all the families in the township gathered in the school laden with baskets full of mouth-watering homemade goodies. There were lots of speeches, singing and music which I barely heard as my mind was doing somersaults imagining what school would be like from now on. We were called one by one for the presentation. She was given a wooden clock with the date inscribed on it, a sparkling necklace which I thought looked like real diamonds, a book filled with good luck messages and photos from everyone in our community. Then it was my turn, I almost fell as I stumbled forward my heart bursting with pride but breaking with pain at the same time. My hands were shaking and I had tears streaming down my face as I handed over the huge bouquet of flowers. Mrs Beaton reached out and put her arms around me and I could hear her voice shaking as she said 'I am going to miss you all so much'. 'Me too' I whispered and amid all the hand clapping and cheering I knew from that moment life at school would never, ever be the same again.

**Dorothy Fraser (Kennedy)**

*The school closed in the 1960s. To find out more about bygone Blarmacfoldach listen to Chris Robinson's podcast series, Beyond the Cattlegrid on the museum's website. <https://www.westhighlandmuseum.org.uk/podcasts.jsp>*



Dorothy Kennedy & Angus Cameron (front row) Dorothy's sister Margaret & Colin MacDonald (back row)



# Highland Archaeology Festival 2021

The museum took an active part in this year's Highland Archaeology Festival which ran from 25th September to 15th October. The festival aims to celebrate our shared history and archaeology and showcase the incredible heritage on our doorstep as well as the importance of protecting this for future generations.

This year the museum focused on delivering walking tours rather than indoor events at the museum due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

**Highbridge Skirmish.** On Saturday 25 September Paul MacDonald, of MacDonald Armouries, led a walk from the Commando Memorial in Spean Bridge to the Highbridge, the scene of the first skirmish of the 1745 Jacobite Rising. He explained the fascinating history of the conflict and described recent archaeological discoveries that have been made at the site. These include a Brown Bess trigger guard from a British Government issue rifle and musket balls fired by Jacobite soldiers found embedded in the bridge now on display in our Jacobite gallery.



Highbridge walk group



The Highbridge, scene of the first Skirmish of the 1745 Jacobite Rising

## Cille Choirrill Churchyard Tour.

On Sunday 26 September our Director Kenny Mackintosh led a guided walk around the Cille Choirrill chapel and churchyard near Roy Bridge. In a fascinating talk he focuses on the history of the graveyard from Columban times through to the present. The visit included a look inside the restored 15th century chapel.



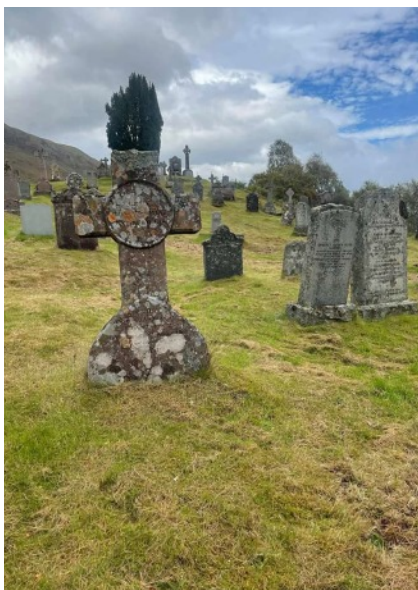
**Kilmallie Graveyard Tour.** On Friday 1 October our Director Ronald Cameron delivered a fascinating guided walk at Kilmallie churchyard. There has been a church in this vicinity since the 13th century, so he focused on these buildings and some of the significant events that occurred there, or were connected to this place, and some of the remarkable people whose final journey ended here.

## Beyond the Cattlegrid at

**Blarmachfoldach.** On Tuesday 5 October our Vice Chair, Chris Robinson guided a group around the small crofting settlement of Blarmachfoldach on the outskirts of Fort William. In glorious weather the participants found out about the people and places around this special location. To find out more about Blarmachfoldach, you can listen to Chris's podcast series, also titled Beyond the Cattlegrid, on the museum's website. <https://www.westhighlandmuseum.org.uk/podcasts.jsp>

## The Siege of Fort William & Beyond.

On Wednesday 6 October Chris Robinson hosted a guided walk around Cow Hill and finished at the Craigs burial ground in Fort William. He focused on aspects of the Siege of Fort William in 1746.



Cille Choirrill churchyard

Left: Kenny Mackintosh leading the Cille Choirrill tour



Chris Robinson leading the Blarmachfoldach group tour



The Blarmachfoldach walking group



Museum Manager, Colleen Barker at Blarmachfoldach

**Visit to Craig's Burial Ground.** In the final walk of the festival on Friday 15 October Chris Robinson led an insightful guided tour to the Craigs Burial Ground in Fort William which served local townspeople and the Garrison of Fort William. The trip included tales of a Gaelic Scholar, the story of a sad drowning of a little girl, and a man who killed 21 men and died quietly in his bed in 1728.

One indoor event was planned at the museum, this was to be hosted by Ross Hunter of West Highland Metal detectorists. Sadly, this event had to be cancelled due to rising COVID-19 rates in Fort William. We hope to re-schedule this event for 2022.

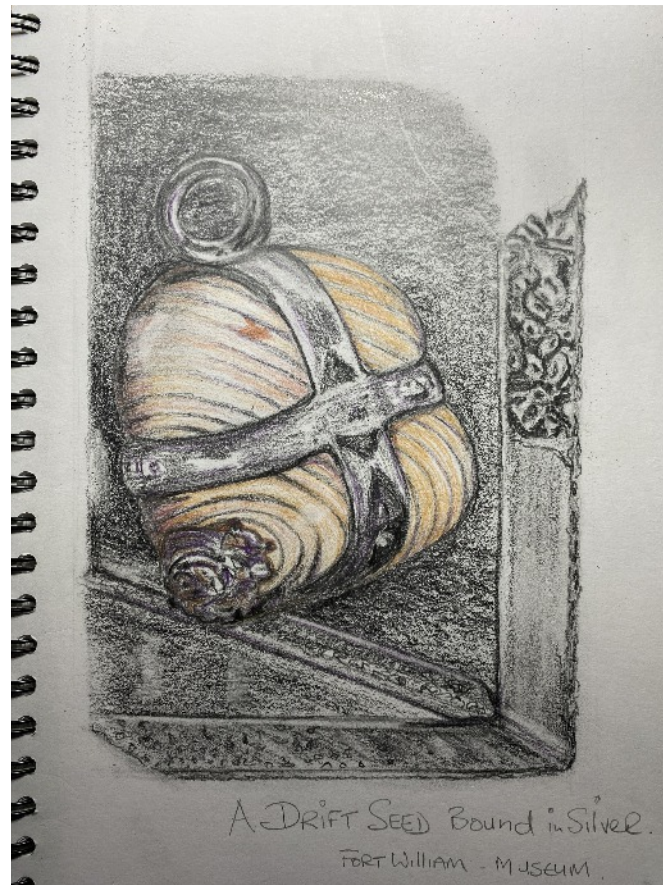


# Students Return to the Museum after Lockdown

We were pleased to welcome students back to the museum in Autumn 2021. Educational visits to the museum were suspended in March 2020 when the museum closed to the public due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students from the NPA Drawing Skills at West Highland College, University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) visited the museum in October for a day of drawing.

Ali Berardelli, Art and Design Lecturer, led the group through the collection and encouraged the students to find objects of interest that relate to their personal project for the course. Several students attend NPA Drawing Skills online and they were able to access the museum's online collection via the West Highland Museum website. This is the new 100 Objects resource that was developed during lockdown to engage with audiences online. The online gallery was created in partnership with the University of St Andrews and showcases 100 of our most popular objects.

Ali said; "West Highland Museum offers a unique display of great interest to our cultural heritage and environment. Examining objects through drawing allows skills and ideas to develop and having the collection available both virtually and within the museum encourages research and is fantastic for our students to explore."





## The Governor's Room

Although the first garrison at Fort William was erected in 1654, it was not until 1690 that the timber and earthwork construction was replaced by a more permanent fort with stone walls and a deep protective ditch on the one landward side. The officers' houses were stone built but the private soldiers were housed in wooden barracks. This new impressive fortification was no longer the garrison at Inverlochtie but Fort William named in honour of the king



*The ruins of the old Fort, Fort William*

It was to this refurbished fort and to the Governor, Colonel John Hill, that Maclain of Glencoe came on 31st December 1691 in the mistaken belief that Colonel Hill could administer the oath of allegiance to the Crown. There in the Governor's room he was directed to Inveraray and as history relates signed the oath six days late. Maclain's fate and that of his clan was sealed.



*The Governor's Room installed at West Highland Museum*

From the Governor's room at Fort William the final orders for the massacre of Glencoe were issued. Indeed, a detachment of troops left the Fort to assist in the slaughter but a severe storm delayed them so that they arrived only in time to share the plunder. Arising from this black day in Highland history the Governor's room became known in later times as the Glencoe suite.

The policing and administration for a large part of the Highlands continued to be centred with the Governor at Fort William. The Fort and the Governor survived a siege mounted by Jacobite supporters in 1746.

It was from the Fort that "James of the Glen" was despatched for trial for a crime (the Appin Murder) that he did not commit, to the court at Inveraray. And, it was to Fort William and the Governor that he was returned prior to his hanging at Ballachulish.

The Fort continued to be manned by regular soldiers until 1854 and during the time of military occupation the Governor's room was used by the officer in charge. The first stone house in the town of Fort William was built to house the Governor once it was considered safe for him to live outwith the precincts of the Fort. The core of the house probably dates from the late eighteenth century.

By 1864 the Fort was sold to Alexander Campbell of Monzie. Part of the barracks was made into dwelling houses but the Glencoe suite remained.

After the founding of the West Highland Museum in 1922 the trustees were desperate to find a permanent home for the growing collection. Moving exhibits for a series of summer exhibitions was not a happy option. The Glencoe suite was considered but rejected as too small and of difficult access.

However, in 1936 the panelling of the Glencoe suite was removed from the Fort and presented to the museum. Once re-erected the vivid green colour was soundly criticised and a notice which read "This paint is the exact shade of the original paint found on the ground wood underneath many layers of paint and papers" had to be posted at the room entrance.

Today the panelling is still green. Amazingly despite the grim reminders of military horrors and instruments of torture on display within the cabinets and considering the unhappy and sometime tragic decisions that emanated from this room the atmosphere is now almost benign.

**Betty Bruce**

## Christmas Celebrations & Colleen's Retirement

On 7th December twenty-five directors, staff, and volunteers gathered for the first time since 2019 for our Christmas night out at the Highland Cinema adjacent to the museum in Cameron Square. It was a very enjoyable evening, with a delicious, but unconventional festive feast of local produce. The night out was also an opportunity to bid farewell to our museum manager, Colleen Barker, who retires this month after 10 years of service. Colleen has been a much-loved and respected member of the museum team over the last decade, overseeing a period of growth and success for the museum. During her stewardship visitor numbers have soared from 9,000 to 60,810 visitors a year, and the museum finances have stabilised thanks to her business expertise. Colleen is not saying goodbye completely and still plans to volunteer at the museum, but she is taking a well-earned break. Museum Chair, Ian Peter MacDonald, presented Colleen with flowers, chocolates, champagne, and gifts from the staff and volunteers.



*Image credit Iain Ferguson*

## Education Update

The museum's education programme was suspended for much of 2021 due to the continuing COVID-19 pandemic. We received two requests for primary school visits in June, but decided it would be prudent to wait until the Autumn before we welcomed school groups back into the museum. In October we greeted Inverlochy Primary School and in November Mallaig High School. Betty Bruce delivered a fascinating Victorian themed morning for the primary pupils and provided a marvellous whistle-stop tour of the museum for the senior students.

Over the years Betty has provided an excellent educational experience for countless numbers of young people who have visited the museum, and ran the museum's Saturday Club for many years. Betty has already tried to retire from her role once in 2016, but because we were unable to fill her shoes, she has continued to provide this vital service for the museum, supported by our volunteer Jo Godfrey. Betty has now decided permanently to retire from this role and we are very grateful for her years of service and commitment to the museum.

We now need to recruit a volunteer to co-ordinate and host school visits. If you know of someone willing and able to help with schools' visits at the museum, please ask them to get in touch.

Call Vanessa on 01397 702169, or email [vanessa@westhighlandmuseum.org.uk](mailto:vanessa@westhighlandmuseum.org.uk)



## Volunteer with us!

Can you spare time to volunteer with us? Volunteers are essential to the success of the West Highland Museum. Due to the impact of COVID-19 our volunteer numbers have halved since 2019.

In these difficult times, the West Highland Museum is actively looking for new volunteers to support us. If you are interested in helping your local museum, we would like to hear from you. We are currently looking for volunteers to provide a warm welcome to visitors at reception and in our gift shop. We are also looking for help in the office. Our Curator Manager needs help cataloguing parts of the museum's collection.

Volunteering at West Highland Museum has its social benefits, offering free museum membership to volunteers, shop discount, opportunities to go on volunteer trips, attend coffee mornings, and our festive celebrations. Since Spring 2020 we have been unable to socialise due to the pandemic, but times are changing and we will be holding our first social event on 7th December with our Christmas night out at Highland Cinema.

**If you would like to join our award-winning volunteer team, please contact Sonja on 01397 702169 for an informal chat, or email us on [info@westhighlandmuseum.org.uk](mailto:info@westhighlandmuseum.org.uk)**



Volunteers day out to Achnacarry Castle and Clan Cameron Museum, 2019



Volunteer Co-ordinator, Sonja McLachlan (front) with volunteers (L-R) Anne Mackenzie, Kenny Mackintosh, Moira Shearer & Christine Hutchison (Image: Iain Ferguson)



**Merry Christmas from  
everyone at the  
West Highland Museum  
& Happy New Year  
for 2022**



### West Highland Museum

Cameron Square, Fort William  
Inverness-shire PH33 6AJ

T: 01397 702169

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

[www.westhighlandmuseum.org.uk](http://www.westhighlandmuseum.org.uk)

Taigh-tasgaidh na Gaidhealtachd an Iar



Pinterest

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### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

**18 August - 18 November 2022**

Return of the Stuarts exhibition

**25 May 2022**

AGM, 5pm, venue to be confirmed