

Heritage Service Newsletter – Spring Issue – April 2022

Museum & Tasglann nan Eilean Survey - we would like your opinion

As part of helping us plan for the future and prepare for [accreditation](#), Museum & Tasglann nan Eilean would like your views. Whether or not you have ever used our services or visited us, we would like to ask you to complete this short [survey](#). You can also enter a prize draw to win one of three e-vouchers worth £50. This research has been funded by Museums Galleries Scotland.

Scotland's Photograph Album: The MacKinnon Collection

This highly acclaimed [touring exhibition](#) from the National Galleries of Scotland and the National Library of Scotland has recently opened at Museum nan Eilean Stornoway. It is the first in-person special exhibition we have had since summer 2019 and has been proving very popular.

The photographs were collected by Murray MacKinnon and represent Scottish life and identity from the 1840s through to the 1940s – a century of dramatic change and innovation. The exhibition celebrates a small selection from the 15,000 photos in his collection, including some from the Outer Hebrides. It also features some never-before shown photograph albums from our own collections.

There is also an accompanying [Activity Programme](#) which is island wide and includes Curator's talks, family-friendly arts and crafts activities inspired by the exhibition, photography workshops for all ages and a schools competition so please keep an eye on this page and our social media for forthcoming events. Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Scottish Government and the Art Fund the exhibition is on until 18th June. We are the last of the four touring venues, so make sure you **don't miss it!**

Conservation funding success

Tasglann nan Eilean was recently awarded a grant of £1,600 from the [National Manuscripts Conservation Trust](#) to conserve [Barra School Board](#) records. Five of the minute books were in a very fragile condition through poor storage conditions in the past, and the presence of mould presented a health hazard preventing them from being used. The records are a valuable source of information for the history of education, teacher employment, public health, social conditions and local customs, amongst other topics and complement the information found in individual school log books, not all of which have survived. The work is being carried out by a specialist archive conservator based at Highland Archive in Inverness and will mean we can use the collection in future for research, exhibitions and projects.

Sònraichte Project ends... Archaeology Awakened begins

The [Sònraichte Project](#) ended in March and has resulted in approximately 200 boxes of archaeological assemblages held by Museum nan Eilean being fully catalogued, photographed and repackaged. The final assemblage worked on was from St Kilda, which was excavated in the 1980s. It contained a selection of finds from the late 19th to the early 20th centuries which came from three houses and a rubbish pit.

This project has helped us to identify the research and engagement potential of finds and make better use of our museum storage space. As part of the project we were able to fine-tune the retention policy for archaeological finds in the museum collections. During

excavation, all materials recovered from a dig are collected and assessed. When analysis is completed, this material is usually rationalised by the excavating archaeologist, so that only relevant material is kept, and becomes the permanent assemblage deposited in the museum. In this case, that rationalisation wasn't done at the time, so this project has finally allowed this to happen as part of the research.

The good news doesn't end there however! The heritage service was granted further funding from Museums Galleries Scotland to begin a new project: '[Archaeology Awakened](#)'. This aims to focus on a large archaeological assemblage from Traigh na Berie, to improve its management, documentation, preservation and accessibility, and also to deliver presentations and workshops to various audiences to promote the museum's collections.

Hebridean Connections

The [Hebridean Connections](#) digital community archive has had a busy few months, in addition to ongoing technical reviews. The Hebridean Connections assistant participated in a [Knowledge Exchange programme](#) at the British Museum, learning from other professionals so that she could share experience of best practice with Heritage Service colleagues. She also undertook legal data compliance checks to enable use of Hebridean Connections records as inspiration for the fantastic [Local Heroes](#) exhibition at An Lanntair, organised by the Befriending Lewis and Harris charity which tackles isolation and loneliness.

Hear All About It!

The image shows the cover of the Radio Times magazine. The main headline is "Radio Living history" in large, bold letters. Below it, a sub-headline reads "Museums can help shape our future by telling the stories of ordinary people's lives, says Neil MacGregor". A small photo of Neil MacGregor is included. The cover features several article teasers:

- 1 SYMBOL OF HOPE ▼** The Aignish Farm Raiders memorial and drawing of the monument by Will Maclean. This huge memorial commemorates a bitter fight for land in 1888 after the injustices of the Highland Clearances, when impoverished crofters attempted to take back the land and were arrested and jailed. The monument was commissioned by the local community and built in 1995, while the drawing in the museum is by the man who designed it, Will Maclean. The 5ft-high cairn is split in half to show division and has jagged stones protruding in the gaps, representing weapons and wounds. The community now has the right to buy the land, so the memorial has become a hopeful symbol that has brought it together. The museum is where you meet to discuss the history of land ownership in the past and what you want to do about it now.
- 2 MAKING HISTORY ▲** Smith of Derby clock. The recently renamed and reopened Museum of Making is on the site of a former silk mill that was probably the first fully mechanised factory in the world. What they have done is transform the space from a place that showed old machines into a museum of how things are made today. It's a bit like The Repair Shop, except that the museum also works with local employers such as Rob-Royce to encourage apprenticeships. This 19th-century clock used to be on the tower in the town square, so every clock shows it. But when it needed to be repaired, the work took place in the central part of the museum with local craftsmen – there's no "behind the scenes" in this museum. If you think about what's happening in all five of these stories, what's so interesting is that what was previously in the background, not spoken about or seen, is now front and centre and the basis for future conversations.
- 3 LANDMARK WEDDING** Clearer the Pier wedding outfit. From the time of the Prince Regent, it has always been ideal as "out there" of pleasure and sexual freedoms. It has been the gay capital of Britain for quite a time so the museum wanted to ask, "does that mean now?" The history of oppression faced by the LGBTIQ+ community hasn't been told and they wanted to tell that story, not just for people in this country also for the tourists from overseas as a student population in the city. There is a collection of costumes in fact 50 to 60 years, but this community curated exhibition offered a chance to the wedding outfits of the first two we brought to get legally married to each other. In the programme, we ask them what for them to see their outfits in the museum is part of history. What they've done become something important to talk about because the setting for gay rights goes

Museum & Tasglann nan Eilean recently featured on Radio 4's [The Museums That Make Us](#) series.

Neil MacGregor, former Director of the British Museum, travelled the length and breadth of the country to look at how museums reflect the identity and ambitions of their local communities. Caitriona MacCuish and Seonaid McDonald of the Heritage Service, along with Agnes Rennie, Chairperson of Galson Estate Trust, discussed the Will MacLean drawing of the Aignish Land Raiders' Memorial Cairn which is on display in the museum, and how it relates to the theme of land, past and present. They also visited the monument itself.

Neil MacGregor nominated the visit to the islands as his number 1 choice in the *Radio Times* series preview. He also commented on how pleased he was to see the Lewis Chessmen in Museum nan Eilean Stornoway as he had been British Museum Director when the loan was negotiated.

A lorry load of archives!

Tasglann nan Eilean was offered the Stuart Bagshaw collection in 2019 – a significant architectural archive. The logistics of the transfer and processing such a large collection meant we had only been able to take in a small fraction of it by the time Covid struck in March 2020.

Rather than trying to continue to tackle the transfer in batches, which would take years, it was decided to hire a large, refrigerated trailer for a week to enable us to freeze the whole collection in one go. All the archives had to be wrapped in polythene to prepare for freezing, at temperatures below -30°, to kill off insect pests. After being frozen for a week the material was next placed in the Special Exhibition gallery to reacclimatise. Over the following few weeks, everything was unwrapped, rehoused in acid-free archive boxes, and transferred into the archive store, maintaining the order of the files. Having completed this phase, it is hoped that funding can now be found to fully catalogue the collection.



Some of the Stuart Bagshaw collection reacclimatising after being frozen for a week

Cruinneachaidhean Foillsichte/ Collections Revealed Project

Thanks to funding from Bòrd na Gàidhlig we are currently working with a freelance Gaelic translator on a project to catalogue, fully transcribe and translate the Museum's collection of Gaelic audio recordings, creating bilingual summaries and search tags for each recording. Look out for further news on our social media channels as this project progresses.

Voices: The Community Story

Tasglann nan Eilean will be working in partnership with the [Scottish Council on Archives](#) over the summer to contribute to this national project, as part of an initiative to mark Scotland's Year of Stories 2022. The project will focus on people who have migrated to Scotland, to give voice to their stories, and enable some of these to be preserved as part of our archive collections. SCA will provide training and guidance on best archival practice including oral history training and digital preservation as well as the opportunity to network and form new partnerships. This builds on a 2021 pilot project [Voices: The Hebridean Story](#). The aim of this was to interview, publish and archive a snapshot of the experiences of people living in the Hebrides during the Covid-19 pandemic.