

# Highland Archive Service April 2025 Newsletter



Welcome to the first newsletter of 2025. As usual it's been a busy start to the year across all of the Highland Archive Service centres and we hope you enjoy hearing what we've been up to in the updates below. If you have any feedback or would like to know more about any aspect of our work please contact us on [archives@highlifehighland.com](mailto:archives@highlifehighland.com).

## Highland Archive Centre Update

### **Welcoming Kirsteen!**

Over the last few months our team have been busy assisting visitors researching everything from the development of electricity in Inverness and textile production in the 1700s, to LGBTQ+ history in the Highlands and 18th century migration to the Caribbean.

With Archive Assistant, Alasdair, now being occupied elsewhere two days a week (see why below!) a part-time replacement was needed and we are delighted to introduce you to our new member of staff, Kirsteen. Although newly employed with us, Kirsteen is not new to archives as she explains below –

"I started working at the Highland Archive Centre as an Archive Assistant in February this year, but I had previously volunteered here during my last year of school as a High Life Highland Young Leader. In the interim, I studied Anthropology and History at the University of Aberdeen and am still working towards a further degree in Scottish Heritage with them. It is lovely to be back here again in a different role. Archives offer us a unique and fascinating view into the past, and I look forward to the work I will be doing with them."



## **Education**

We have been busy since the start of the year working with schools across the area, and have thoroughly enjoyed sharing our collections with pupils and teachers from The Bridge, St Clements, Ardersier, Dochgarroch, Tarradale, and other schools. We have supported learning about witchcraft, the Highlands in World War Two, Jacobites, Victorians, the Highland Clearances, and a range of other subjects.

We were delighted to be part of Central School's World Book Day celebrations, where Community Engagement Officer, Lorna, spoke at assembly about her life with books including the joy of working with precious and unique books at the Highland Archive Centre. In addition, it was a pleasure to welcome Central teachers to the Highland Archive Centre for a collegiate visit (without pupils!) – giving them time to learn about the work of the archive service, and reflect on ways we can work together in future.

We have also continued our work with (slightly!) older students by speaking once again to UHI Centre for History students as part of their Public History studies.



## **Group Visits, Talks, and Tours**

As always, we have been busy with talks and events and it's been wonderful to speak about our work and collections to both local audiences (including Knocknagael Ltd., Inverness Women's Group, and Culloden and Balloch Baptist Church) and those further afield (such as Headway East Lothian and the National Rural Mental Health Forum).

We have also continued our online series of talks, Learn With Lorna, which now has 218 episodes covering a wide range of subjects, all available to watch back here.

If you're a teacher or a member of a club or group and you would like to arrange a talk (in-person or online) or a visit please get in touch – we'd love to hear from you.

## **Family History**

Anne, our Family Historian for the past 14 years, has decided it is time to address her work-life balance, reducing her days to Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday. She continues to be busy with 1-1 consultations (over Zoom or in-person), carrying out commissioned research for those interested in finding out about the



lives of their ancestors, and producing family trees for customers. As well as carrying out commissioned research Anne has been busy giving talks to various groups since our last newsletter (including Crown Church Women's Guild, the Royal Naval Association City of Inverness Branch, and Nairn U3A) and has delivered Family History for Beginners and Advanced Family History classes both on-line and in-person.

With Anne no longer working Thursday or Friday, a position arose for a new Family Historian to take on the remaining two days. Alasdair (below), who has been part of the Archives team since 2017, and who has worked closely with Anne over the years, was the successful candidate and started his new role as Family Historian in January.



Alasdair has been enjoying getting his feet under the desk. Although only working part time in the role, he already has a busy schedule of 1-1 consultations, and has carried out research on multiple family trees already. Asked what he has discovered since starting the job, Alasdair says:

*"No matter how extensively someone has researched their family tree in the past, it is almost always possible to find something new for them to take away. I had a mother and daughter visit from Australia recently, who had made a substantial financial outlay to have their Fraser ancestors from Ardersier researched in great depth by a genealogist who had not visited the Highland Archive Centre. If your ancestors come from the Highlands, there is a good chance we can find some of them referenced in documents that are unique to our collections. In the case of these Frasers there was a poignant moment where we located a 19th century volume which showed the enquirer's great grandfather being admitted to, and dying, in Inverness Poorhouse. There are so many different avenues we can explore from a family history perspective."*

Currently, Alasdair is working on a project with a hotel to research the history of a building, looking into the lives of the original owners and the people who occupied it over the years. The present owners hope to restore it, giving a nod to the people who were part of its early history. Alasdair's been delving into the history of a prominent Highland family of the 19th century, as well as tenants of their property which at one time was a boarding house for single or widowed women of some wealth, which he found fascinating.

Family History vouchers make wonderful presents and can be purchased by contacting us via the details below or by visiting our online shop. For more information, please contact us on [archives@highlifehighland.com](mailto:archives@highlifehighland.com) or [genealogy@highlifehighland.com](mailto:genealogy@highlifehighland.com).

### **Am Baile – Highland History and Culture website**

The collections we receive at Am Baile vary enormously in terms of subject matter, location, and size. There is no 'typical' collection, which is one of things Jamie, Am Baile Coordinator, loves about his job. One thing they all have in common is that the contributor has seen the website or one of the social media accounts and decided they have something to share. Sometimes it's a single image, other times it's more.

A few months ago, we shared a photograph showing the MacBrayne's bus depot at Kyleakin, Skye, in the 1960s and one of the people who commented on the post shared one of their own photos of the same depot and said, "I have a few more of these, if you would like them?" A couple of weeks later, a USB stick was delivered containing almost 1,500 photographs of service buses taken all over the Highlands and Islands in the 1960s and 1970s!



It transpired that the contributor, John Sinclair, was a leading authority on the subject and had travelled the area taking these photographs, a few hundred of which have been published in his excellent books 'Highland Buses: From Oban to Inverness' and 'Buses of Skye and the Western Isles'. His entire collection runs to almost a quarter of a million images!

The majority of bus services in the Highlands and Islands during the 1960s and 1970s were operated by Highland Omnibuses, a company formed in 1952 as part of the state-owned Scottish Bus Group. It was created through the merger of Highland Transport, Macrae & Dick, and Alexanders Town Services. While better known for ferry services, David MacBrayne Ltd also operated some bus routes, often coordinating with ferry schedules to serve the islands. The collection shows how buses were vital for connecting small and isolated communities where railways were scarce or had been cut back.

We're indebted to John for giving Am Baile access to, and permission to use, images from his personal archive and Jamie has thoroughly enjoyed going through the collection and selecting ones to be uploaded to the website. There are many which have never been seen before and are certain to be a popular addition to the site given the popularity of restored MacBrayne's buses at vintage vehicle fairs and the fondness with which people talk about them.

The Am Baile website can be found [here](#).



## **Conservation**

The conservation team has recently been working on the Nairn Museum herbarium collection, which was put together by Robert Thomas, and which comprises plants and specimens local to the Nairn area. This collection is a little different to the items we usually work on in the studio, but Senior Conservator, Richard, has undertaken work experience on a herbarium collection previously – whilst on placement at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh.

The collection arrived in the suitcases it had been housed in since the early 1900s, with items separated by botanical classification and folded in acidic brown paper folios. The specimens had been adhered and mounted onto paper supports slightly larger than A3. At some point in the collection's history there had been a moth infestation, clear from the moth casings and frass found. Condition of the specimens varied – some were completely lost, some had minor issues, and the majority had only a few losses.



Nairn Museum, knowing that this collection was important for the local area, sourced funding to have the collection re-housed, cleaned, re-mounted (where necessary), and digitised, to safeguard the items for the future.

Each group of specimens was treated together, with efforts made to reunite loose specimens with their group. The original acidic folders were discarded, retaining only the original handwritten labels. The supporting paper was cleaned using a latex aerated (smoke) sponge and the herbarium specimens themselves carefully cleaned using a soft brush. Damaged paper supports and tears were infilled and repaired using Japanese papers and tissues of different weights, along with paste made in our conservation studio. Loose herbarium samples had paste brushed to their reverse and were weighted down onto the paper support to dry. Where required strips of Somerset paper were used to splint and anchor plants stem

in place.



New folded-paper folios of Somerset 115gsm paper were made to re-house the herbarium collection, with the original labels re-adhered onto the new folders. The folios were then placed into custom-made boxes. Any loose fragments of specimens unable to be matched to their original location were housed within a polyester pocket and stored together with the herbarium log-books. It was a pleasure to work on the collection for our friends at Nairn Museum!

For more information about our conservation work please visit <https://www.hIGHLIFEhighland.com/archives-service/conservation/>

### **Contact The Highland Archive Centre**

**Postal Address:** The Highland Archive Centre, Bught Road, Inverness, IV3 5SS

**Email:** [archives@highlifehighland.com](mailto:archives@highlifehighland.com)

**Telephone:** 01349 781 130

**Facebook:** @highlandarchives

## **Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archive Update**

### **Following the Fish project – exhibition launch:**

For over 100 years the herring girls were the backbone of the UK's fishing industry, undertaking back-



breaking work and forming strong and enduring communities as they travelled the length of the British Isles. Following the Fish is a joint project run by High Life Highland's Archive Service in partnership with Suffolk Archives, the Norfolk Record Office, and Tasglann nan Eilean (the Hebridean Archives) to capture and share their stories.



The archives teams and volunteers across the project have been hard at work creating both in-person and online exhibitions in advance of our two official launch events. We would be delighted if you're able to join us at either one:

- 8th May, 6.30pm, at Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archives, Wick, KW1 4QS
- 22nd May, 6pm, at The Hold, 131 Fore Street, Ipswich, Suffolk, IP4 1LR

The exhibitions will showcase records from all the archive centres as well as stories, photographs and memories captured through interviews with locals and family members of herring girls. We look forward to welcoming you to one of the events to celebrate the lives and work of these women (no booking required).

### **School Engagement Programme**

We are thoroughly enjoying working in partnership with Wick Voices to deliver an educational outreach programme to schools across Caithness. Archives tell stories of our county's heritage over centuries and can be linked into all study areas in the Curriculum for Excellence. Staff have recently visited Watten Primary School for sessions on Lighthouses and Farming and have more visits both to and from schools planned for the coming weeks.

### **Caithness Football Memories**

Following several significant deposits of archives relating to local football teams and initiatives, a new reminiscence group called Caithness Football Memories was launched at Nucleus on the evening of the 26th March. The group is for anyone and everyone with an interest in Caithness football, past and present. Attendees were able to explore photographs and memorabilia, as well as bring along their own keepsakes, and share memories and stories over tea, coffee and biscuits.

### **Talks and Events**



On 17th March, **Wick Society**'s Doreen Leith delivered 'Industrial Caithness: Winds of Change', an illustrated talk as part of the Caithness International Science Festival. The Wick Society's oral history project Wick Voices gathered extracts from a series of interviews to illustrate the profound change in working life in Caithness over the years. Doreen presented personal stories that illustrate the manner in which changing conditions of employment and technology have not only had an impact on working lives but capture an element of hope for future generations. On 22nd March members of the Nucleus team again worked with Doreen, this time to attend the Science Festival Family Fun Day, highlighting records, stories and oral history recordings linked to science, invention and discovery.

In a busy run of events, in the same week Nucleus hosted Dr Iain Macdonald who delivered an evening talk and Q&A on 20th March. The subject was his new book *Watercolours from Thurso, the Thames, and Tahiti* about Scottish watercolourist William Alister Macdonald.

### **Care Home Visits**

As part of a reminiscence programme offered to local care home facilities, Caithness Archive staff, in collaboration with Wick Voices, have been visiting Laurandy Day Care Centre, Riverside Nursing Home, Pulteney House Care Home and Seaview House Care Home in Wick. Recent sessions have focused on sport and travel, with residents able to engage with reproductions of historical records, photographs and newspapers, as well as oral history recordings. Visits continue every month .

### **Dounreay Reminiscence Group:**

The Dounreay Reminiscence Group has ran six session as part of the 2024/2025 winter season. Sessions ran once a month from November to March with talks from the Dounreay Young Generation Network, ex-employees and Nucleus. We've also been continuing our displays of photographs from the NDA archive, capturing precious metadata for posterity.

If you are interested in attending look out for events posted on our **Facebook page** or get in touch with us at [north.hilandarchive@highlifehighland.com](mailto:north.hilandarchive@highlifehighland.com) to join our mailing list.

If you are part of a group or organisation that would like to organise a visit to Nucleus, or if you'd like to know more about any of our events or projects, please get in touch with us at [north.hilandarchive@highlifehighland.com](mailto:north.hilandarchive@highlifehighland.com). We'd love to hear from you!

### **Archive Afternoons:**

Join the archive team at Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archives every Wednesday to explore the past, reminisce with friends and enjoy a cuppa and a biscuit. Each week archives from our collections will be on display in the public searchroom. Everyone is invited to come and explore. Tea, coffee and biscuits will be

available at the front of the building, alongside displays of digitised videos and photographs showing Caithness in the past. Sessions run every Wednesday from 1pm-4pm. No need to book, everyone welcome!

### **Engage with us online**

Our online exhibitions, including 'Atomic Housing: Thurso Transformed', 'Atomic Recreation', and 'WK: History of a harbour' can be found on our [website](#) along with all previous editions of our blog, 'Stories From The Archive', which take an in-depth look at our collections. Please do have a look and please follow us on Facebook to see a wealth of material from Caithness' history!

### **Contact Nucleus**

Nucleus is home to the archives of the UK civil nuclear industry and the historical archives of the county of Caithness. Please get in touch with us at:

**Postal Address:** Nucleus: The Nuclear and Caithness Archive, Airport Industrial Estate, Wick Airport, Wick, KW1 4QS

**Email:** [north.highlandarchive@highlifehighland.com](mailto:north.highlandarchive@highlifehighland.com)

**Telephone:** 01955 602 444

**Facebook:** [@nucleuscaithnessarchive](#)

## Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre Update

Spring is beginning to show its first signs in Portree, with the days getting longer and moments of warmth in the air. Since the start of 2025, the team at Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre has been busy engaging with the community and visitors through various exhibitions and events. One notable exhibition is "Iomain: An-dè, An-diugh agus A-màireach," which showcases the history of shinty players from the past, present, and future which will be on until mid-April.

We are delighted to announce that on May 24th -29th we will be hosting Where We Stand, celebrating 100 Years of Community Ownership. This exhibition, which acknowledges and celebrates the efforts, ingenuity, and passion of all those involved in community ownership over the last century, originally toured across parts of Scotland in Summer 2024 in partnership with the Travelling Gallery. These artworks are about tracing the roots of this social movement to see what has flourished already, and to wonder what blossoms are still to come.





Archivist Catherine has been busy delivering a variety of talks over the past few months. In January we participated in the Mackintosh School of Architecture's field trip to Skye. The Rural Lab in Skye exposes students to rural and landscape issues in the Highlands and Islands, culminating in an event at the Gathering Hall in Portree. The event brought together a range of people, including architects, furniture makers and archivists who are engaged in the cultural landscape. Catherine (pictured below right) gave a talk on Skye's built history and architecture, ranging from beehive butts and prehistoric roundhouses to modern buildings, reflecting on the social and historical events which shaped the landscape.



We had two events with The Struan History Group (pictured above left). In January we celebrated The Clarion of Skye newspaper with a talk and series of displays. The Clarion of Skye was first published in 1951,

aiming to strengthen social and economic ties across Skye and the Highlands. It featured local news, appeals for young people to return to Skye, calls for improved infrastructure, and advertisements that supported its financial sustainability. The Clarion (available on Am Baile) gained international circulation, with subscribers as far as Nova Scotia and the Sudan, and by 1952, it had expanded to 16 pages. The second event, in March, celebrated crofting and fishing and the community created an amazing series of displays detailing their own history of place.

We are looking forward to seeing what a no-doubt busy summer season will bring us, and perhaps we'll meet some of you along the way!

**Contact Skye and Lochalsh Archive Centre**

**Postal Address:** Elgin Hostel, Viewfield Road, Portree, IV51 9HA

**Email:** [skyeandlochalsh.archives@highlifehighland.com](mailto:skyeandlochalsh.archives@highlifehighland.com)

**Telephone:** 01478 614078

**Facebook:** [@skyearchives](https://www.facebook.com/skyearchives)

## Lochaber Archive Centre Update

Since the beginning of 2025, the Lochaber Archive Centre has been a hub of activity. We have welcomed an exceptionally high number of visitors into our Searchroom – from Lochaber, wider Scotland, England, and from America.

On February 5th we were visited by the pupils of Duror Primary School – both of them! They learnt all about archives and our facility, and used our collections to delve deeper into the history of their village. The pupils and teacher can be seen below creating their own archive boxes of memories to take away with them.



We have also continued to work with the Annat Gathering Group, whose work to bring together people and memories from Annat village has allowed the project to grow and grow. In April archivist Rory (below) will be supporting the group in recording oral histories and reminiscences of former residents. These recordings will be part of the Gathering Groups events which are scheduled throughout the year – and will be added to an ever-growing collection housed by the Lochaber Archive Centre and Am Baile.





In February, the amazing Masonic Lodge Fort William No.43 collection was fully catalogued and is now on the shelves and accessible to researchers. We are currently organising a large number of outreach and community engagement events – we look now towards summertime and beyond. 2025 promises to be a busy year.

#### **Contact Lochaber Archive Centre**

**Postal Address:** Alexander Ross House, Achintore Road, Fort William, Inverness-shire, PH33 6RQ

**Email:** [lochaber.archives@highlifehighland.com](mailto:lochaber.archives@highlifehighland.com)

**Telephone:** 01397 707050

**Facebook:** [@LochaberArchiveCentre](https://www.facebook.com/LochaberArchiveCentre)

Your donation can make a difference

Did you know that by making a donation you can play a part in helping the Highland Archive Service preserve, conserve and make accessible over 700 years of Highland history?

High Life Highland is a charity and we rely on your donations now more than ever. You can make a donation to any one of our archive centres or Am Baile and help us to continue our work as well as delivering extra services such as the events, talks and exhibitions you have been reading about in this newsletter.

To make a donation please click on [this link](#), select your archive centre, and select your donation amount. All contributions are very gratefully received.

Thank you!

## Join Highlife

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For more information, or to join, please visit <https://www.highlifehighland.com/join-high-life-highland/>



The advertisement features a smiling woman in a black tank top in the foreground, with two other women in the background, all in a bright, modern gym or leisure center. The High Life Highland logo is in the top left, and membership pricing is in the top right.

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High Life Highland's membership provides unlimited access to a range of health and fitness opportunities in 25 leisure

to a range of health and fitness opportunities in 25 leisure centres throughout the Highlands.

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