

Curator's Report

October – November 2024

My focus has been on progressing grant applications and the financial sustainability strategy.

New Acquisitions

Two Lochs Radio signage

Grants

I input into the Financial Sustainability working group – a finalised Financial Sustainability Strategy was sent to the board for ratification at the present meeting.

We have received the Richmond donation for our Endowment fund, amounting to £37,627.

The Whatever the Weather programme has received additional grants from GAMS, the Rimmer Trust and a private donor, amounting to a total of £12,000. This covers our current shortfall as well as the winter lunches. We have been successful in our application to the CMHW fund and will be awarded the full sum of £10k, contingent on receiving match-funding. A private donor has been approached for match-funding, and award decisions for our Age Scotland application will be publicised in January.

We completed an expression of interest meeting with Creative Scotland to gather feedback on our Creative programme application. Feedback was positive with notes around stressing need-based activity development and gathering letters of support from local community groups and organisations. Our application seeks £50-60K to support additional staff time and a local residency programme over a period of 18 months.

I invited input from volunteers on Estelle's project (new proposed working title: *50 Years, 50 Voices*), met with Rachael, Ben and Anna to discuss the role of Intangible Cultural Heritage, and redefined the focus of the project. The *50 Years, 50 Voices* project celebrates our 50th anniversary with a two-year oral history and outreach programme. Using W.S. Thomson's postcards as a framework, it will gather stories reflecting changing ways of life, cultural traditions, and community identity, culminating in a co-curated exhibition in 2027.

We are also in the scoping and research phase for the 2027 Roundhouse project which included drafting a project outline shared with the Events & Outreach Group and Ever Greener Group, as well as a research visit to Arbriachan forest site and roundhouse to learn from their experience, with main takeaways being to factor in continued cost of rethatching as fungal growth is a common issue.

Environmental Monitoring

IPM and RH fine in all spaces.

Projects

Options for the enhanced Events and Incidents Map as part of the Three Wars gallery were appraised. We are working with Pixel Stag who will design a touchscreen option, allowing further layers of interactive content to be added.

Costings for the Maerl display are now confirmed.

Completion of 2024 calendar, with note to start planning for 2025 earlier.

I am progressing planning for the 2025 roundhouse dig with Tom Gardner, approaching Zurich for an insurance quote and liaising with Roy re obtaining landowner permission.

Collections Research & Enquiries

Shieldaig Excavation Material (Tom Gardner's appraisal)

The box appears to be from the 1978 excavation of MHG7705, a burial cairn at Shieldaig. The excavation was not published or dated, but a summary is in *Discovery and Excavation Scotland* (1978). To explore the assemblage further, I recommend:

Advertising the material to the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland.

Considering radiocarbon dating for items like teeth or charred hazelnut shells.

Consulting Kirsty Cameron, the Local Authority Archaeologist, to check for related paper or photographic archives.

Botulism enquiry

A researcher has looked into our Botulism archive holdings, uncovering insights into contemporaneous reporting and articles such as on the funeral of Mr Robertson, to piece together a coherent narrative from news reporting and testimony. The enquirer seeks additional documentation, photographs, and anecdotes related to the hotel, its staff, visitors, and their fishing experiences, as well as guidance on locating graves of the seven fatalities. He is also interested in engaging with Duncan Mackenzie for further discussion and is open to sharing findings through explanatory notes for the museum and a potential presentation.

Kay Matheson – stone of destiny fragment & Letter of Bertie Gray (correspondence with researcher below)

I'm particularly pleased to have rediscovered among my notes the letter and label in the Matheson archive - I'd looked at them back in 2023 but not quite appreciated their significance at the time. [...] the key thing you might like to note for now is that you have something rather nice indeed, the significance of which I think has previously been under-appreciated, or perhaps simply not recognised.

Kat Matheson had a fragment (letter, your item 63) and my paper describes the context in which she received it / the fragments created in 1951 should be more widely understood. But your item 190, the luggage label with ditty, was originally associated with that letter and fragment. That's a very nice piece of social, indeed political, history. Bertie Gray, who was curating and distributing the fragments from 1951 could issue them with letters of authenticity, which are really rather formal, but this is an affectionate and witty 'outlier' for someone who was so intimately involved with what happened. Joining the dots makes for a very nice story, I think. If only we knew where Kay's locket and fragment were. (Picture of her wearing the locket here: <https://thestone.stir.ac.uk/2024/03/28/my-life-is-in-pieces-new-life-for-fragments-from-the-stone-of-destiny/>)