

# APPLECROSS ESTATE

## FROM THE TRUSTEES OF THE APPLECROSS TRUST

As you will be aware, the Applecross Trust has been one of the specific targets of a campaign by the newly formed group known as Land Action Scotland (LAS).

Recent articles in the press have generated disquiet in many quarters, and we would like to set out the issues in a factual way and encourage all interested parties to consider matters in a calm and deliberate manner.

The Trustees are hugely appreciative of all the support received following the recent press articles and wish to express their sincere thanks to all those who have telephoned, emailed and written in support of the Trust and its work.

### HISTORY

Some history might be helpful in order to appreciate how estates such as Applecross originally evolved and how they are continuing to evolve in modern times and in difficult economic conditions.

The comprehensive history of Applecross is told by the Historical Society in the Heritage Centre ([www.applecrossheritage.org.uk](http://www.applecrossheritage.org.uk)). The Estate was owned by Lord Middleton and his family from 1864, of whom it is said that they had a fine reputation as caring lairds. It was then acquired by members of the Wills family in 1929 at the start of the period before the Second World War which became known as the Great Depression. The family had made a fortune in the tobacco industry and their ownership ensured the continuation and indeed expansion of much needed employment opportunities in maintaining Applecross House and its surroundings as a focal point within the community.

Economic conditions did not improve in the years after the Second World War and changes in society meant that the maintenance of a former lifestyle became increasingly difficult. By the early 1970s high taxation and government policies, targeted at encouraging resources such as timber to meet a perceived industrial demand, at the expense of more socially and environmentally acceptable alternatives, had all added to an air of general decline. However some encouraging signs of recovery were seen with the advent of the Howard Doris oil platform construction yard at Kishorn in 1974 and the opening of the North Coast road in 1975.

### THE APPLECROSS TRUST

The Wills family moved to capitalise on these opportunities, not for themselves, but for benefit of the general public. John Wills and Andrew Wills formed the Applecross Trust as a charitable body in 1978, with the principal and primary objective of maintaining the physical and heritable character of the Estate and conserving it in a responsible but progressive manner for everyone – both local residents, tourists and for future generations and all those who care about Applecross. These members of the general public remain the sole beneficiaries of the Trust. There are no other private or family beneficiaries.

In addition to the ownership of the land and buildings on the Estate, John Wills and Andrew Wills endowed the Trust with a substantial sum of money to enable it to set about its objective. Not all of this money was spent, the bulk of it being wisely invested over the years, initially in the stock market under professional guidance and then gradually more and more in the regeneration of the Estate infrastructure with the intention that its future maintenance should become self sustaining.

As a Scottish Charity and as an incorporated company the Trust is tightly regulated, and open to public scrutiny. Its annual accounts have always been available on request, and will be available to download from the Trust's website in due course

### **ABSENTEEISM**

Landowners are often accused of absenteeism as if this was, in every case, some sort of negative. However, as many crofters and householders within the Highlands have discovered over the years, there is an increasing need to generate income from external sources, often resulting in a requirement to seek suitable employment some distance away. Many wish to retain their links with their family homes despite having had to leave to pursue a career elsewhere, and thus return for holidays and, in many cases, retirement. The underlying rationale for landowners is similar.

The Trustees of the Applecross Trust all have close links with the Estate, although they also have responsibilities elsewhere which mean that they cannot realistically become resident locally. Active local involvement is nevertheless central to the objective of the Trust, and for this reason the Trustees have appointed an Administrator to be their representative on the ground at Applecross. Lorna Lumsden, one of the current Trustees, was the Administrator for 19 years and is well known locally. The current Administrator is Archie MacLellan, a Skye crofter. He is well qualified in all aspects of land management and, most importantly, understands the Highland culture. As well as being in Applecross regularly, he is also in continuous contact with all the Trustees.

### **THE TRUSTEES**

**Richard Wills** as a son and grandson of the Founders of the Trust has spent time at Applecross every year of his life and has 30 years experience in land management, conservation and deer management.

**Rodger Harvey Jamieson** was a Founding Trustee and for 30 years a partner in Murray Beith & Murray, an Edinburgh law firm, and has wide experience with connections to other Scottish charities. He is experienced in commercial negotiations and is responsible for the Kishorn development.

**Peregrine Bertie** is another founding Trustee who was a member of the London Stock Exchange for over 30 years where he oversaw the management and growth of the Trust's portfolio of stocks and shares and since his retirement is still responsible for ensuring the charity's funds are invested wisely.

**Kenneth McDiarmid FRICS** is one of the senior Land Agents in the UK with 40 years of experience. He first came to Applecross in the 1960s and has continued his association to this day. He is the Trustee responsible for the Farming enterprise.

**Lorna Lumsden MBE** was administrator of the Trust for 19 years before becoming a Trustee. She was awarded the MBE for her services to the charity and has a wealth of knowledge on Applecross. She is involved with other Scottish charities and community groups.

**Andrew Mackinnon** has had 45 years experience in managing land before recently retiring. He, again, has long associations with Applecross stretching back to the 70s and is responsible for the conservation and deer management enterprises.

The Trustees are not remunerated and work voluntarily for the Applecross Trust. They have between them a diverse set of skills so chosen to deliver the charitable objectives of the Trust. In 2012 they claimed a total of £1,711 in expenses.

#### **TRUST ACHIEVEMENTS**

The Trust has been involved in numerous initiatives over the years, and most of these have involved partnership arrangements of one sort or another. In addition to trading income the Trust has helped secure in excess of £6m of investment in the peninsula since 2000. A few examples, out of many, include:

Setting up the North Applecross Woodlands Company with eight directors, comprising one from the Trust and seven from the north coast crofting townships. It is the largest landlord – crofter initiative ever attempted and successfully delivered the complete removal of all red deer from 24,000 acres with the establishment of a 15 mile deer fence and an amenity planting scheme of over 1,000,000 trees to generate a sound biodiversity base and regenerate previously existing woodland.

Agreeing the provision of land for the Craic Barn development of affordable housing which ultimately provided 8 houses for local people.

Upgrading the Trust's housing stock to provide accommodation for both local residents and for tourists who contribute to the local economy.

Promoting the Kishorn Yard and other suitable sites for economic development.

Creating and upgrading of over 35 miles of interlinked footpath network throughout the Estate for the enjoyment of both visitors and Applecross residents.

Acquiring Clachan Church from the Church of Scotland and supporting its use by the community.

Providing premises and financial support to Applecross Historical Society for creation of the Heritage Centre.

Providing financial support to the Community Company for the community run petrol pumps.

Encouraging the development of local businesses through provision of facilities, investment and favourable rental terms.

Developing sustainable land management programmes with the aim of maximising biodiversity benefit.

Taking a facilitating lead role in the £2M Heritage Lottery supported Applecross Landscape Partnership Scheme [ALPS] programme, which is delivering significant improvements to the peninsula. Two thirds of the way through the three year delivery programme, the Trust will fund approximately £500,000 towards the programme which will invest in projects as diverse as a Bardic school, restoration of stone dykes and Clachan Church to the building of a round house for education and interpretation. More information on the wide range of ALPS projects is available at [www.visit-applecross.org.uk](http://www.visit-applecross.org.uk)

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The Trust will shortly give a subsidised long lease to Applecross Community Company to enable them to build a hydro scheme near the farm. The lease to be granted is on favourable terms following a professional valuation. The scheme will generate funds to invest in the future of Applecross.

#### **THE ISSUES AND QUESTIONS TO ASK**

The campaign by Land Action Scotland (LAS) came out of the blue. Its launch seems to have been ill thought through, and was carried out in a deliberately aggressive manner, with no attempt at prior consultation or discussion.

It appears that the immediate objective is to take over the management of both the Applecross Estate and the Mount Stuart Estate. As a direct result of the campaign, the Trust has to date received over 90 applications for membership, almost exclusively from people far removed from Applecross and with no known connections to the area. What would a group of people unfamiliar with Applecross on a regular basis bring to the day to day operation of the charity?

Is this a genuine desire to actively manage a large, quite complex, charity which already operates within a very tight regulatory framework? The Trust has a long standing, well established relationship with various funding agencies, and it is this credibility which has helped to secure match funding for local projects, and which has increased the funds available for significant joint local initiatives.

LAS say they want to help the local populace to control their own lives. How would taking over the Applecross Trust, a conservation and heritage trust, achieve this? The Trust has already moved towards greater local consultation with its involvement through the ALPS programme, and the Trustees are giving thought as to how this might be continued into the future.

What is LAS's real interest? What will they gain from the exercise? What would they bring to the charity and to Applecross? What would Applecross gain from such a change of management? What advantage would be gained by having to service the demands of inactive members of the Trust?

#### **CONCLUSION**

People will surely conclude that this is a purely politically motivated campaign with little or nothing to do with this actual Estate or this Trust or the works being carried out for the benefit of Applecross.

Thank you once again for all the support the Trust has received from the Applecross community. It is much appreciated and greatly valued.

Archie MacLellan, Administrator.  
For and on behalf of the Trustees