

NEWS FROM FOULIS

Hector's News



Combining rather unripe oats on the steep side of Blackhill, below the new Foulis wind turbine, 4th October 2015

Scotland has suffered a miserable summer with endless grey skies and rainfall practically every day since mid-April, this sort of weather does not make for easy farming. The Spring was cold and wet, as a result of which the crops went in late and not in perfect conditions, they were slow to grow and even slower to mature. As a comparison, in 2014 which was a good year, we started harvest on 18th August and had everything safely in the steading by 3rd of September. This year we did not start our harvest until 6th of September and cut the penultimate field of oats on Sunday 4th October, a full month later than the previous year. I say penultimate field as we still have one small field of oats which are as green as cabbage and I am not sure whether we will actually manage to harvest them. It has not been easy for the Scottish livestock farmers either, due to the weather they were unable to turn out their cattle for fear of poaching the non-existent grass with the resultant cost of extra housing and feed. Some even had to sell early a good proportion of their herds in order to alleviate pressure on ever dwindling supplies of fodder.



On the family front it has been a happy year with my mother celebrating her 90th Birthday in March, our youngest daughter Aline getting married in April and Alpha celebrating 25 years of her wonderful youth fiddle group. And I also managed to sneak away whilst she was in Romania in June, for eight days walking and sleeping in mountain refuges with friends in the Southern Pyrenees. During July, we had a glorious holiday with all our children, their spouses and the grandchildren in rural France, a first for us and something that gave us a great deal of pleasure.

Timmy Munro of Foulis MBE

Celebrated her 90th birthday on 8th March 2015.



Timmy has had an exceedingly busy year as usual at Foulis, hosting a number of charity events including, the annual Daffodil Tea on the 26th April organised by the local Soroptimist's Group which made £1200; the May Red Cross Lunch organised by Janet Bowen, Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant for Ross & Cromarty and Romy Williams raised £3600 and an evening concert along with another local event in aid of the Highland Hospice organised by musician James Ross made £600.

Regular visits to the Castle now scheduled for Tuesdays continued throughout the year, with almost 400 individuals from UK, Canada, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Europe and China touring the house so far this year, the great majority of whom have Munro connections.

Group Visits have included, The Ross-shire Gardening Club, The Victorian Society, London, The Highland Branch of the Arts Fund, the Royal Highlander Train for a whisky nosing and tasting and a number from cruise liners calling at the port of Invergordon.



Timmy with some of her great grandchildren, April 2015

Finnian's News

Exciting changes have been happening around the Castle during the past 12 months. Foulis Farms' new biomass heating and grain drying facility has taken 3 years to establish from conception to fully built. Having seen the opportunity presented through the UK Government's Renewable Heating Incentive (RHI) to not only heat all the houses surrounding Foulis Mains Farm by using home grown Foulis timber, but also to fuel a much needed new grain drying store and thus modernise our farming practices, we have built a sizable new facility covering two large drying floors and additional storage space for cereals and woodchip.

The shed has two boilers that service all heat requirements when drying, one internal 500kW Froling boiler from Austria and the other a freestanding 495kW Ekopal boiler from Poland, sitting to the West of the shed. The Froling uses woodchip to produce heat and the Ekopal can consume any woody material that can fit into its furnace including straw bales. These boilers supply heat to the floor driers but also supply heat and hot water to 10 residences and a workshop including the Castle which had central heating installed last year.

Trenches dug in all directions from the new shed had special heavily insulated underground pipe placed in them to service the surrounding houses. The only casualties during the project were two burst 18" water mains, an underground power cable and one BT telephone line which was not too bad considering nearly 900 metres of trenches were dug.

So far, the woodchip and grain drying have been a success, as we have not used a single drop of fossil fuel to either provide heat to the houses or dry our malting barley and oats for human consumption (porage, muesli, oatcakes etc.) which are sold through our local malting barley co-operative Highland Grain Limited.

Within the last month, we have also installed 40kW of solar photovoltaics on the new shed roof in an effort to offset our growing electricity charges for running the facility, and construction has begun on a 500kW run of river hydro scheme being built on the river Skiack which runs along the Northern boundary or march between Foulis and the neighbouring properties.

On the family front, Finnian and Ohma's son Hector (5) has just started school at Kiltearn Primary and Leyla (3) has begun Nursery.

Ohma revived The Pavilion in Foulis Castle courtyard as a holiday let on Airbnb this year. The people who have stayed so far at The Pavilion are fascinated with the history of Foulis as the seat of the Clan Munro, and all fall in love with the peace and quiet of Scotland.

Also a reminder that Ohma created The Clan Munro Gathering Magazine, it is free to download as a PDF from ISUSS. Once in the ISUSS website just search Clan Munro and it will come up, click on it and you can view online or click on share below it and an option to download will appear. If you are interested in buying the magazine go to the Blurb website which has a bookshop that you can search Clan Munro and it will appear to view & order. It's a great edition for the coffee table of Clan Munro life.



Henry & Isabella Blake's News



Isabella (nee Munro of Foulis) and Henry Blake have welcomed a new addition to their family, Sula Aline born on 22nd October 2014 at Raigmore Hospital, Inverness. Hamish (3) has stepped up to the new role of big brother with delight but with slight reservations now she has started walking and is able to reach his precious dinosaurs! The family continue to enjoy their move from Foulis into the neighbouring town of Dingwall where they live in a house built of red sandstone once taken from the derelict Dingwall Castle which stood alongside. The Castle of Dingwall has a long historical

connection with Munros. As early as the C14th the Chiefs of the Clan paid their rent to their superiors the Earls of Ross there. With the forfeiture of that Earldom it became a Royal Castle and during the reign of Mary Queen of Scots, George Munro of Milntown, became Governor. During the C18th Dingwall Castle was bought by William Munro of Arduillie, but had become derelict by the middle of the Century. A section of ruined masonry still stands in Henry & Isabella's driveway.

Henry's commute is now a 5 minute bike ride to his work base at Munro's Sawmill, run by his father Philip, and started by his late maternal grandfather Duncan Munro. Henry's Woodblox business www.woodblox.co.uk is going from strength to strength and received a four star trade stand award this year at the famous Chelsea Flower Show in London. Woodblox has also just negotiated a franchise deal to supply the Czech Republic, Germany and Austria.

Aline Watcyn Jones née Munro of Foulis

Aline Munro of Foulis youngest daughter of Hector and Sarah (Alpha) Munro of Foulis and Tom Watcyn Jones, married at Foulis Castle on a cold but gloriously sunny April 18th 2015.

Lillah (1) was subsequently christened the following day in the big drawing-room. They all currently live in Sheffield close to where Tom works as a busy surgeon specialising in urology. They are both keen skiers and have an interest in a small business in the Austrian Tyrol. Until the birth of their daughter, Aline worked in TV and media as a stylist. They are expecting their second child in November.



Sarah's (Alpha) News

25 Years of Kiltlearn Fiddlers

25 years ago Feis Rois set up Kiltlearn Traditional Music classes in Evanton Primary School to encourage Traditional Music in Ross-shire. From the Traditional Fiddle Class, I initiated the youth group 'Kiltlearn Fiddlers' to improve performing expertise and confidence as well as to inspire further Traditional music in the area. Since then, Kiltlearn Fiddlers have grown from strength to strength and play regularly for Festivals both here and abroad (Brittany, Sweden, Denmark and Ireland), ceilidhs, charity events as well as community multi-arts performances. I organise and co-ordinate all the group's performances.

To celebrate their 25th Anniversary we have produced our fourth CD *25 Years of Kiltlearn Fiddlers* now available from various outlets including www.feisrois.org. This CD not only features the current group it also includes fantastic music from past participants who are now renowned such as Graham Mackenzie (fiddle), Mattheu Watson (fiddle and guitar) and Katie Mackenzie (song). There are tracks also from Dagger Gordon (mandolin) accompanied by Mike Simpson (guitar) both Feis Rois Guitar Tutors and Kiltlearn Fiddlers' accompanists over the years.

During September 2015 Blas Festival in conjunction with Fèis Rois put on a sell-out concert in Evanton to celebrate Kiltlearn Fiddlers' 25th year. We also celebrated with a Tea for local past participants and families which was great fun and I put together all the press cuttings from the early 1990s for them to laugh about.

In July I took Kiltlearn Fiddlers to the International Eisteddfod, Llangollen, North Wales where they made waves as the only Scottish performers with many performances including a competition set on the main Pavilion Stage winning third place in an International Open competition. During the International parade round the small town of Llangollen they had the privilege of meeting Prince Charles and The Duchess of Cornwall who spent time chatting to the group. I also had the delight of meeting Terry Waite CBE, humanitarian and author.

Founded in 1947, the International Eisteddfod is a very special festival which has delivered a message of peace to the world since 1947. Each year 4000 International performers get together and the festival attracts up to 50, 000 visitors. Kiltlearn Fiddlers have attended this festival on a number of occasions.

I still teach 35 young people for Fèis Rois on a weekly basis at Kiltlearn School and continue my freelance work using music to help children and adults with disabilities.



The poster for Blas Festival 2015 features a green and pink color scheme. At the top, it says 'BLAS festival 2015' with the dates 'September 4-12 Sultain' and the website 'www.blas-festival.com'. Below this, it lists the event details: 'Friday 4 September | Dihaoine 4 Sultain', 'Evanton | Baile Eòghainn fèis rois', and 'The Diamond Jubilee Hall @ 7.30pm'. A prominent pink banner reads 'Kiltlearn Fiddlers @ 25' and describes it as 'a special concert marking their 25th anniversary with guests Lauren MacColl | Katie Mackenzie | Graham Mackenzie'. The poster includes several images: a group photo of the Kiltlearn Fiddlers, a close-up of a fiddler, and a portrait of a woman. At the bottom, there are contact details for online tickets (0844 888 9991) and a local box office (01349 862600), along with the Twitter handle @blasfestival and the website www.blas-festival.com. Logos for various sponsors are visible at the very bottom.

Lèirsinn

In 2013 I set up Lèirsinn Project meaning vision or seeing in Gaelic to celebrate the work of Blind composers from the 17th century to the present day in the Scots/Irish tradition. In 2014 this project comprising of well-known local Traditional Musicians performed around the Highlands and for the National Gaelic Mod in Inverness.



In January 2015, I had the fascinating experience of a long weekend in Bucharest Romania. Invited through charities Fèis Rois and Light into Europe lightintoeurope.org myself and the musicians with visual impairments, Fiona Kyle (clarsach) and Mark Thow (pipes/whistles/accordion) went out to to inspire the Blindschool in Bucharest. I also played for a Burns Supper whilst I was out there and to my surprise on the menu I found Clan Munro chocolate cake! Further to that visit in June, courtesy again to Fèis Rois and Light into Europe I was asked back to participate in an integrated arts week with children from the Deaf school, the Blindschool, local Romanian Primary children and the International School. This project allowed children to come together and integrate through music, art, drama and dance: www.facebook.com/LightintoEuropeCharity.

At the end of October 2015 Lèirsinn is being performed for the international Storytelling Festival in Edinburgh at John Knox House. It includes the story of Robert Mor Munro, blind baron of Foulis during the 17th century who befriended and acted as patron to blind Iain Dall Mackay piper to the Mackenzie's of Gairloch.

Event at the Storehouse 2015

Storytelling Quilt Session in the Storehouse, Foulis Ferry, December 2014



In December 2014 I organised a Storytelling event to bring people into the Storehouse Museum which was a success.

In Pic: Alpha Munro, (Fiddle) Lizzie MacDougall (Storyteller), Natalie Kilgallen (Cello).

One of Lizzie's stories is charming true Munro tale of "The Heiress of the Creel" and this is the version given in Mackenzie's History of the Munros.

In 1705 Munro of Tearivan died leaving his three daughters orphans when still quite young, Christian the eldest, being only nine years when her father died, and it is said that the Mackenzies, who knew that she would succeed to a fair fortune for those days, resolved to kidnap her in order to marry her when she arrived at a suitable age to one of their own relatives, but the old family nurse got wind of this and placed the girl in a creel (wicker

work basket for carrying peats etc), covered her over with cabbages, and walked down the avenue from the house with the creel on her back while the Mackenzies rode up the other. The faithful nurse in this way got clear away with her charge and found her way to Fowllis Castle, where Sir Robert, twenty-third Baron, received her hospitably, and agreed on the solicitations of the old crone, to bring up the girl under his protection until she arrived at an age to choose a husband for herself, and ever after she was known as 'The Heiress of the Creel'.

In due course she married Sir Robert's second son George Munro of Culcairn, and it must have been a happy marriage as she had no fewer than eleven children by him.

Kiltearn Churchyard



Hector is involved with a local charity, The Evanton Community Trust and as part of its work, they are currently in discussion with the Church of Scotland over the future of the beautiful ruin of the Kiltearn Old Parish Church. All over Scotland, the Church has a serious problem, being not only owners responsible for the upkeep of active Churches with dwindling congregations but also being custodians of decaying ruins such as Kiltearn and Alness. Both have for long been associated with the Munros. Kiltearn Old Parish Church is a case in point,

unroofed in the 1950's, its walls are open to the elements yet this important historic building sits in the middle of an active burial ground. The Church of Scotland would dearly like to hand responsibility over to someone else but with regular annual maintenance and safety inspections costs required who would possibly take it on.

The ruin is of particular importance to Munros as our ancestors not only worshipped there for hundreds of years but are buried all around this picturesque site down by the shore of the Cromarty Firth. As a first move on 3rd October Evanton Community Trust held a fact finding afternoon, when members of the community could visit the Kirkyard and investigate the interior of the ruin (usually boarded up for safety) and give their views on what they would like to see done to preserve it.

You can learn more about this important building by visiting the following link
www.rossandcromartyheritage.org/communit/k21/pl/k21_pl_index.html

N. Carl Monroe

In late September we were saddened to learn of the death of a past President of Clan Munro Association USA, N Carl Monroe, Greensboro, North Carolina at the venerable age of 94. Carl was a good and generous friend to Clan Munro and in particular the Chief's family, the Munros of Foulis. They had the pleasure of knowing him and his wife Marge as personal friends for the best part of 30 years. Hector stayed with them at their house in Greensboro and visited some of Carl's construction projects in the early 1990's. He was very much instrumental in raising funds in the US to help achieve the Clan Centre at the Storehouse of Foulis and for that alone his memory will always be held dear.

Carl was a highly motivated and intelligent man whose company was much enjoyed by the many who knew him, particularly when he and Marge made regular visits to Foulis during the 1990's and early years of this century. The Chief's family were personally very upset when for whatever reason, he decided he could no longer work with CMA USA, and realise that he probably felt let down, but in the end of the day the organisation was bigger than one of its members.

However, over the years he and Marge kept in touch, and Hector had a lovely telephone conversation with him just a couple of months before he died when he caught up on all his news and discussed the type of eagle that he was going to have carved on a walking stick.

(An obituary appears elsewhere on the CM(A) website)