

CAITHNESS BROCH PROJECT

CHAIRMAN'S ANNUAL REPORT (OCTOBER 2018 – OCTOBER 2019):

The work up to October 2018 on the replica broch consisted of identifying a preferred site (John O' Groats Mill), getting a positive response from the Highland Council to a pre-application planning permission for the Mill site, producing a computer model of the broch, and writing a business plan. The committee considered that the option study to select the preferred site was not sufficiently robust, so a call for new sites was made through the media: some old sites were reopened for consideration and new offers made. All sites were visited, and discussions held with landowners. We also did online and paper-based consultation on site selection criteria. It was decided to progress the work using an architect who would take a fresh look at the project, and to phase the work based on the RIBA Plan of Work 2013. The first two phases are "Strategic Definition" and "Preparation and Brief". In line with this, we went out to tender to the most suitable Scottish architects with the specification to deliver a "Project Brief". The contract was won by Hoskins Architects with support from Jura Consultants, and is on-going. The funding for this has come from a Crowdfunding round, Caithness and North Sutherland Fund, and other sources including Your Cash Your Caithness, Dunnet Bay Distillers, and Tesco. The level of popular support, not just words but hard cash, was very gratifying. Robin and Iain went to Glasgow to meet Kenneth and the Hoskins and Jura team. This first face-to-face meeting led to a useful discussion about how the project could be funded through the build phase, and to what extent the build itself could become a living, working attraction and educational / research space.

Robin, Kenneth and Iain then met with Historic Environment Scotland at their offices in Edinburgh to discuss the Ousdale Broch conservation project and potential collaboration on work in the far north.

The Ousdale Broch conservation project start was much delayed by drawn out negotiations with funders and other parties. Finally we ended up with Scheduled Monument Consent, Planning Permission, and a funding package. Kenneth tried to track down the skeleton that was uncovered at Ousdale by Victorian excavations, but this appears to have been lost. An article on the BBC news website did lead to some interesting information on Ousdale being handed to us from an amateur researcher in New Zealand! Marc Wild of Merlinworks did a drone survey of the site and produced a 3D model using photogrammetry. Clyde Archaeology won the contract to perform archaeological services during the project. G Brown stonemasons from Edinburgh won the stonemasonry contract. Engineering and contract supervision are through Addison Conservation and Design. The conservation and access works are on-going.

The Project was joined by the Caithness Countryside Volunteers for a project to control giant hogweed at Achvarasdal broch by laying geotextile and gravel on the floor of the broch. This was approved by Historic Environment Scotland by means of Scheduled Monument Consent. The work was completed within budget, but unfortunately has highlighted the poor state of repair of the walls which need urgent work. This has been brought to the attention of Historic Environment Scotland.

Iain and Robin met with a windfarm developer to discuss a more stable funding stream for the Project. While the Project is glad to receive funding from windfarms and their community funds, it was not felt to be appropriate for the Project to invest in a windfarm, which essentially what was on offer.

The Project had discussions with the Highland College in Thurso about building a small-scale ruined broch at the front of the college building. The intention was to provide drystone walling training and produce a dramatic sculpture at the college entrance that would symbolise Caithness prehistory. The shape of it was staked out and is still there. The funding application was probably too ambitious for the outcomes, and the project is currently stalled.

Iain presented an update of CBP's work at the Orkney Archaeology Society's Brochtoberfest 2018, "a celebration of all things brilliant about brochs".

Chris met with Highlife Highland in August to discuss the future of the Broch Centre at Auckengill and the potential for collaboration. This led to Chris doing a pre-arranged tour for a group from the Broch Centre to Nybster broch, giving him a chance to explain the John Nicolson connection, and a meeting with the Senior Curator of the Ancient Mediterranean Collections at the National Museums Scotland.

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The Project was a finalist in the Scottish Heritage Angel Awards Category E: Best Heritage Research, Interpretation or Recording, for our 'Year of the Broch' campaign, which promoted the archaeology and brochs of Caithness. Launched in 2014 and funded by the Andrew Lloyd Webber Foundation, and run by the Scottish Civic Trust in partnership with Historic Environment Scotland and Archaeology Scotland, the Scottish Heritage Angel Awards celebrates both groups and individuals who have gone above and beyond in their efforts to promote, protect and, in many cases, rescue Scotland's heritage. Iain and Kenneth attended the awards ceremony in Glasgow.

Iain has progressed his project to have a "Lord of the Rings"-style map of Caithness designed, with a blend of old and new landmarks. This will be appearing on merchandise soon.

The Project has kept itself in the spotlight, appearing in The National, Archaeology Scotland, the local Caithness papers, Archaeosoup podcast, and BBC's Grand Tours of Scotland's Lochs.

Talks / shows:

Month	Group
October	Retired People
December	Caithness Horizons
January	Markinch Heritage Group
February	Thrumster SWI
	Berriedale WI
March	Caithness Science Festival
	Retired Teachers
April	Skills for Success
	Thurso Community Development Trust
	Castlehill Heritage
	University of Glasgow
August	Reiss Gardening Club
September	Pennyland School
October	Golspie Heritage

On the administrative front, this year has seen a number of changes. We have a new accountant, a new bank account, new insurance, and a new lawyer. As could be imagined, all this takes a lot of organisation. Fortunately, the committee has taken on some great new members, but we are always looking for people who have the skills, knowledge, and a little time to spare. We also have new directors standing for election. The general principal we are going by is to have a member sit on the management committee for at least a year before being put forward for election to director. The turnover in committee members has given the opportunity to overhaul the accounting and membership management procedures. One of the parallel activities associated with this has been a review of the Articles of Association.

There were three particularly notable fund-raising activities this year. Kenneth put on another very popular quiz at the Thurso Cinema. Dawn arranged for the Live Jive to fund raise for the Project. Kenneth and Chris put on an art exhibition and auction at Lyth Arts Centre. The live auction was the culmination of a series of talks and a family arts and crafts day that made up our own Brochtober. Works, donated by mostly local artists or those with a connection to Caithness, which can still be seen on our website, were won in the auction by folk from as far away as California! And finally... ending on a local but no less fantastic note, we were the proud to receive a donation of £500 raised by Watten Primary School P6 and P7 who were inspired by the CBP "Hidden History Revealed" article published in the Groat.