

Heritage Service Newsletter – Covid-19 Issue – June 2020

The early bird catches the worm - Heritage Grants

During the lockdown period, while all museums and visitor attractions are struggling financially, we encourage all [Comainn Eachdraidh](#) and independent museums to apply for our [Heritage Grants](#). The grants require no match funding and the application form and [guidance](#) notes can be found online.

Due to the Covid-19 crisis we will have two separate rounds of funding for 2020-21:

Round one is open until 4th July 2020 for the following grants: Comann Eachdraidh Membership, Accredited Museum and Two Star plus Visit Scotland Award. **Round two**, for Equipment Grants, will open in August if we have any grant money remaining after round one.

Here are our **top tips** for a successful grant application:

- Read the [guidance](#) notes before you fill in the application form
- Ensure your form is correctly completed and you have signed and dated the declaration
- Ensure you have enclosed all necessary, up-to-date, backup documentation
- Contact us if you have any questions
- We have a limited amount of money in our Heritage Grant pot so apply early

Gibson collection project: unlocking gems from the collection

During the Covid19 lockdown, museum and archive staff have taken the opportunity to digitise and transcribe a fascinating series of letters and share these [online](#).

The William John Gibson collection was gifted to Museum nan Eilean by the executor of Lady Jane Urquhart (nee Jean Gibson), the daughter of W.J. Gibson, Rector of the Nicolson Institute from 1894 to 1925. The collection contains a vast amount of material of interest for local history, social history and the history of education in Stornoway and Lewis.

In October 1916 Jean Gibson left home to go to Aberdeen University. Over the following 10 years, Mr and Mrs Gibson wrote to 'She-ann' (their affectionate nickname for their daughter) two or three times a week. These [letters](#) give a fascinating insight into life in Stornoway and Lewis at this time.

We have set up a project [web page](#) where you can find a full catalogue of the collection.

Pirates & Herring Girls taking over social media

Since the project started in January 2020 and before the lockdown, Shona, our Dualchas na Mara Project Officer had visited four schools, carrying out seven sessions with 279 pupils on the subject of the [Herring Girls](#). During lockdown Shona has been creating exciting maritime related online content for our social media channels. These include posts about [seafaring objects](#), stories about pirates, ['how to make a lighthouse'](#) crafts and teaching some [sea based Gaelic words](#). All this is now available through our [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [YouTube channels](#). This project is funded by Bòrd na Gàidhlig and Museums Galleries Scotland.

Hebridean Connections goes cat crazy

The joy of Hebridean Connections, the online repository of Outer Hebrides history and culture, is that it is already a digital archive. This means that access and maintenance of the [website](#) hasn't been too badly affected by the Covid-19 lockdown. The Hebridean Connections team, Tina and Caroline, have been able to shift seamlessly from office space at Museum nan Eilean, to their desks at home, and still liaise with [Comainn Eachdraidh](#) volunteers who crucially provide the amazing

stories and information for access by researchers around the globe. In fact, we have seen a rise in enquiries from genealogists who are using their lockdown time to pursue their family history hobby.

The Hebridean Connections database has even undergone a recent server upgrade which will ensure the continuity and stability of the system for both our volunteers and the public. Plus homeworking has meant that Caroline and Tina have gained some feline administrative support with data checking, courtesy of [Morven, Stan and Rebus](#).

Cruinneachaidhean Foillsichte / Collections Revealed

Covid 19 has been such a disrupting influence for everyone and resulted in a huge change in how we all work. Closing our doors to the public was a sad but necessary step. However one positive to this is that we now have more time to work with the collections. The new way of working during Lockdown has allowed Ashley to re-start the collections inventory at the museum store in Stornoway. This involves cataloguing, photographing and repacking objects, as well as confirming they are where they should be. We've been able to show the results of some of this work on our [Facebook](#) page so we can share parts of our unique collection – such as [textiles](#) and [products](#) – that aren't usually on display.

Archaeology

The [Archaeology Service](#) has quickly adapted to the Covid-19 crisis to enable a safe continuation of the service provision. Although some development expectations have had to be adjusted Kevin is still able to respond to planning applications as normal (with the exception of site visits and meetings). The service is ready to engage with the commercial sector once economic activity resumes.

The [Western Isles Historic Environment Record \(HER\)](#) continues to be curated and is available for data requests and commercial enquiries. You can also see it on [Past Map](#).

The Archaeology Service continues to offer guidance, support & information to both the public & commercial sector, as well as local and national organisations. It has assisted in the continuation of essential development projects in the Outer Hebrides during the Covid-19 restrictions.

The Archaeology Service also continues to support the [Scottish Islands Research Framework for Archaeology \(SIRFA\)](#) and the [Uist Virtual Archaeology Project](#), both in conjunction with UHI LCC, both of which are beneficial to the social and economic wellbeing of the Outer Hebrides.

Museums & Well Being

[Support in Mind Scotland](#), which works to help people affected by mental health, has a community-based wellbeing project called [Highlands & Islands Connections](#). Uists and Benbecula is one of the pilot areas with a focus on developing links between existing organisations and improving communications across the rural area in order to developing a 'community of care'.

For Mental Health Week in May they launched a new [film](#) which follows the team as they test out different ways of building more caring, connected places. [Museum Nan Eilean](#) features in this as we have been taking part in their new [app](#). Museums and Archives will continue to be important as we move out of lockdown as people will need safe, welcoming spaces where they can relax, have fun, help them feel connected and become involved in projects which gives them purpose.

Exhibitions

As the doors were closed on both our museum venues back in mid-March many of you would not have had the opportunity to visit the National Library of Scotland touring exhibition [Lifting the Lid](#)

which was on in Museum nan Eilean U&B or [Gaelic Books Council@50](#) exhibition which was on at Museum nan Eilean Lews Castle.

For our summer 2020 exhibitions we had planned an exciting joint project between ourselves and [Orkney Museums](#) and [Shetland Museums](#) as part of the [Between Islands Project](#). Due to the restrictions we are unsure when we will now be able to safely reopen to the public and bring you these exhibitions but we hope it will be before the end of the year as we reschedule our planned exhibitions into 2021.

To fondly look back at exhibitions we have had in our venues over the years have a look at our [YouTube channel](#) where we will be adding more over the next few weeks. If you are missing visiting you could also create your own [mini museum](#) and remember that it is important to collect information about what is happening today as it will be the history of the future. Keep [a video or written diary and take photos](#) to show what is happening during this unique time in our lives....it may star in exhibitions in years to come.

Please all stay safe and protect the community as a whole!

