

April 19.

March 27 1981

Nearly 100 people delighted in the display of photographs and old curios which was held in the West Church Hall, Dornoch, recently, prior to setting up a Heritage Centre, it is hoped, in the town.

The exhibition had been organised by Dornoch Area Community Council and included farming implements, domestic utensils, china and pottery and needlework from bygone days.

Mr Ross Noble, curator at the Highland Folk Museum at Kingussie, was invited to give a talk on "A Heritage Society for Dornoch," but he first judged which three items that had been taken along to the exhibition were the best.

He placed first a beautiful three-pronged candle-stick holder owned by Mrs Jessie Bell of Rhian, Dornoch, wife of one of the main instigators of the Heritage Centre idea, District Councillor James Bell. Mr Noble said it summed up the kind of item which enhanced any collection — it was an exquisite piece of art, made by a local craftsman, presumably to a specific design order.

His second and third choices were really in contrast — one a traditional tapestry bedspread, with the Lord's Prayer depicted, and the other pagan charm stones which were used to keep away the devil. The bedspread was owned by Miss Munro, of Clunie Crescent, and the charm stones — which were kept in each corner of a byre to ward off evil spirits — were by Mrs Elizabeth Mackay, Gashagich.

Mr Noble, who has helped to set up several museums throughout Scotland, said that in many ways there was no more helpful asset to a town, especially one so much connected with tourism, than a museum or heritage centre. He mentioned the Farr Museum at Bettyhill, which had grown from strength to strength and proved a great attraction in the area.

But he also pointed out the things that any committee hoping to start such a centre should think about first.

The museum should be constituted in such a way that the collection was legal and could be insured. There should be no chance of getting into a protracted legal battle about who owned a certain item, etc.

Secondly, was the heritage story (of Dornoch) easily tellable by objects, or would it be better told photographically? There was no point in displaying objects which were not connected in some way with Dornoch — an old piece of pottery, for instance, which could not be traced to anything directly linked with Dornoch, was not worth exhibiting in such a centre.

On these lines, would an audio-visual kind of exhibition be a better idea? Finally, how much was the local community and contributing bodies prepared to pay for an exhibition? Mr Noble said that, on average, the running costs were three times as much as takings, and so there had to be a source of money from which the centre could draw, every year.

He said he would be happy to

help in any way, in setting up a heritage centre in Dornoch.

A steering committee was set up, comprising Mr Jim Mitchell, Mrs Rene Oman, Mr Chris Murray, Mr Graham Ross, Mrs Kirsteen Murray, Mr Donald Cameron and Mr James Bell.

Mr Henry Rowe, who had installed so many tourist-related signposts in Dornoch, all at his own expense, was also asked to be on the committee, but he declined.

*Northern Times*