

Fascinating new exhibitions unveiled at Dornoch museum

OF the hundreds of fascinating items on display at Dornoch's Historylinks Museum, one in particular captivated local resident Annie MacDonald.

It was the historic charter, granted by King Charles I, that officially made Dornoch into a Royal Burgh. Written on vellum and originally sealed with the King's seal, it dates back 396 years to 1628.

The charter is housed in a hermetically sealed cabinet and Ms MacDonald stood in front of it for many minutes, marvelling at the perfection of its intricate script and the expert way in which it had been mounted.

She was one of many guests invited to a preview last Friday, on the eve of the museum's opening for the 2024 season. The event was held to showcase new exhibitions and changes to the museum's layout.

Historylinks normally opens at the beginning of April but had to delay its opening this year due to ongoing work on a new extension, which will open later in the season.

The Royal Charter is part of an exhibition housed in the new 'Civic Room' where almost all of the exhibits have not been on display before. Other outstanding items in the room are the Provost's robes and gold chain.

The robes are still worn by current Provost, Catherine MacAngus, on ceremonial occasions. Also to be seen are ceremonial halberds, which were once kept in the council chamber in Dornoch.

Volunteer museum archivist John Barnes, who heads up the museum's archive team, spoke of his delight that the 'Sheriff Court' plaque, which was taken down when Dornoch's sheriff court closed, has finally found a home on one of the walls in the Civic Room.

"We never had a place for it before," he said. "It's very heavy so we couldn't put it on a shelf and it's been on the floor for some time for want of a better place."

Eileen Macrae, archivist at Royal Dornoch Golf Club, assisted the museum curator in the creation of a new exhibition about golf in Dornoch. Central to the display is a timeline of local golfers who have won the Carnegie Shield over the 12 decades the tournament has been played.

Another new exhibition that attracted a lot of interest from guests at the preview is the shops exhibition, housed in the museum's former reference section, which will be relocated to the new extension.

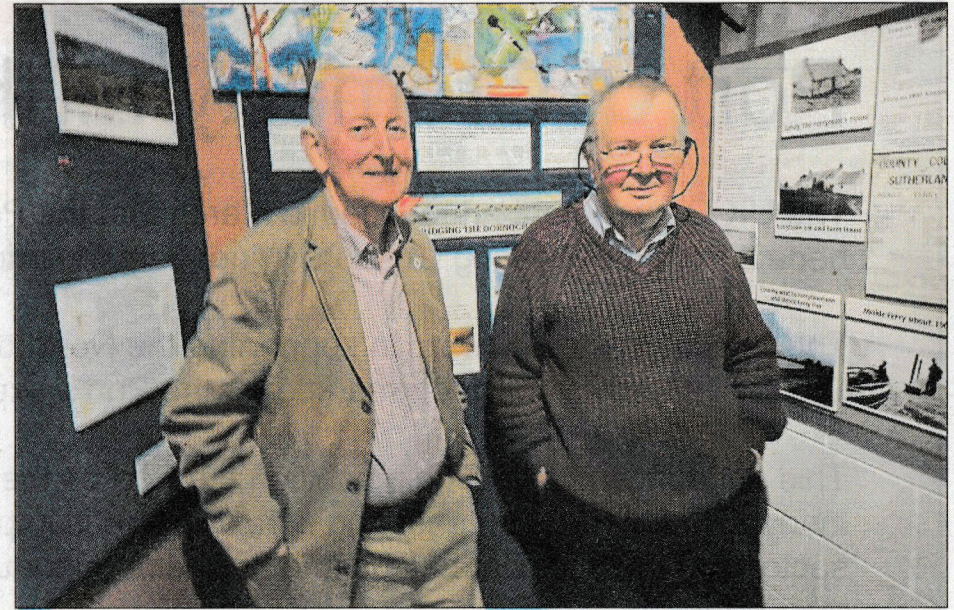
Images from the past show the evolution through the years of some 20 shops in Dornoch. Research revealed a number of fascinating insights, including that the current Dornoch Stores was once run by the grandfather of Sir John Macdonald – the first prime minister of Canada, whose family hailed from Rogart.

A further change in the museum is that the former railway section – which will also be rehoused in the new extension – is now a dedicated viewing area. Here visitors can sit and watch the 'Links Through Dornoch' film and get a taste of the general history of the parish. The film was made by Dornoch Heritage Society chairman Peter Wild.

Changes have also been made to the reception area to provide more space for visitors to enter and exit. The museum welcomes around 6000 people a year.

"We used to get bottlenecks where it was difficult to get in and out so we wanted more space," said the museum assistant.

The small shop area next to reception displays books and products for sale. It has been restocked this season with a selection



Historylinks members John Sutherland and George Munro.

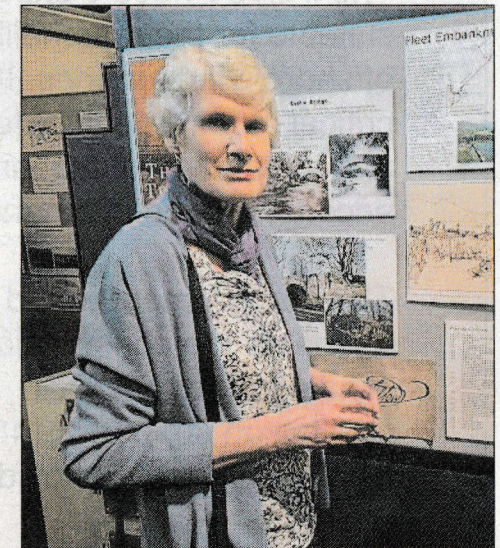
of locally-produced items, including many made by members of the Brora Social Enterprise at Brora Learning Zone.

The items for sale include beauty products such as soap, lip balm and body butter; hand-carved wooden spoons and toadstools, painted boxes, mosaics, brooches and fridge magnets.

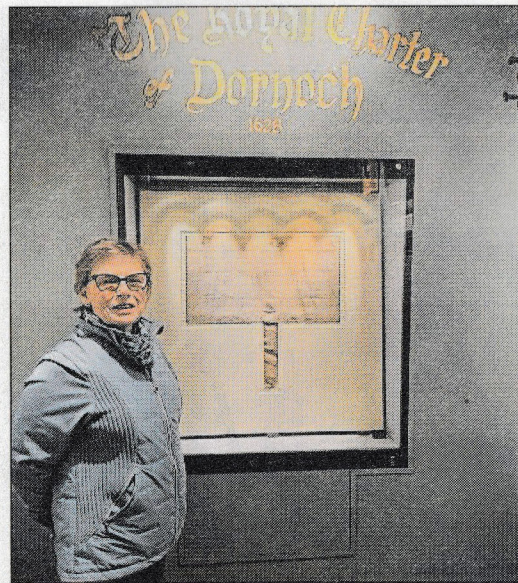
Dornoch Heritage SCIO co-chairperson Alison Davies thanked everyone who had been involved in creating the new exhibits and upgrading the museum entrance area.

She said: "This has been a fantastic team effort. Our staff have worked tirelessly and with the support of our superb volunteers, Historylinks is really moving forward. We look forward to another exciting development later in the year when we open the new extension, the Heritage Hub."

The museum is open seven days a week from 10.30am-4pm.



Fiona MacDonald, who is a Historylinks volunteer, was one of the guests at the preview evening.



Annie MacDonald stands next to the Royal Charter.



Historylinks member Kim Tulloch.



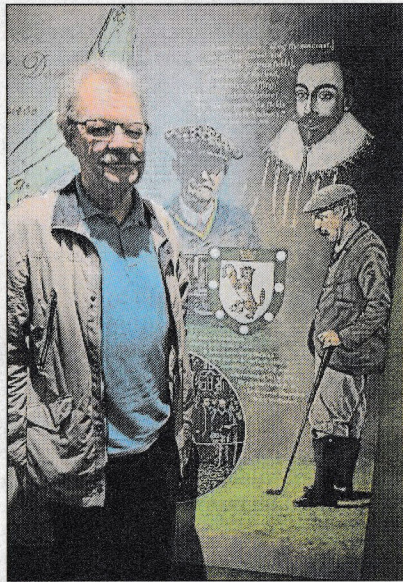
Museum curator Lynne Mahoney, centre, with Dornoch Heritage SCIO trustee Alison Davies, left, and museum assistant Caroline Seymour.



Dornoch Heritage Society chairman Peter Wild at the shop exhibition.



Archivist Jim Barnes points out the Sheriff Court plaque.



Volunteer archivist Graeme Muckart.