



Clan Donnachaidh

Chair's Report to Clan Donnachaidh Society AGM, 2021

I fear I may sound like an old-fashioned vinyl disc with the needle stuck as I make this year's report from the Chair. Sadly it's not all that different from last year's. Re-reading what I reported then serves mostly as a reminder of how long it has been since life was anything like "normal." The only comfort – that really isn't the right word – which we can take after another 12 months of pandemic-related issues is that many other similar organisations must be in the same somewhat becalmed boat as ourselves.

Our formal annual Report and Accounts for our financial year to December 31st 2020 will go to our regulatory bodies after this AGM. The full report will have been approved by Council prior to the AGM. Later in the meeting I shall go through some of the main financial numbers on the sheet which will be in front of attendees: it will be attached to this report on our website in due course. In summary, although our annual cashflow continued to be slightly negative in 2020, we finished the year, and are still, in reasonable financial shape.

Notably, the strength and value of our relationship with House of Bruar has been demonstrated throughout the pandemic by their continuing to pay full rent for those parts of our buildings which they occupy. This is despite their retail business having stayed closed, except for on-line sales, for months on end. Many other commercial organisations were demanding, and getting, rent rebates or holidays from their landlords. However, how to afford a larger museum space remains an unresolved question for the Society, although your Council continues to pursue potential answers.

Our official Trustees' Report accurately describes the 2020 year as one essentially of survival rather than of new achievements, with 2021 already looking like being much the same. This has been almost entirely due to the huge impact of the pandemic and its related restrictions. These affected especially travel but also face-to-face encounters, preventing most of what normally would have been Clan events both overseas and in the U.K. Visitor numbers to Highland Scotland and to Clan country including the museum fell to almost zero. Disappointingly, right up to today we have had no suitable nominees for the Clan Donnachaidh Youth Award during the pandemic.

Last year's Gathering was as we all know almost a non-event. This year's is I fear only marginally better. Unencumbered opportunities to travel to Scotland for overseas members, and even for those of us who live south of the Border, opened up for some only at the very last minute. We have thus been fully expecting today's rather small attendance. However, the virtual and experimental and international "happy hour" which we have set up for tomorrow evening may at least give us a little cheer. We also have the Clan service at Struan Kirk, now in good repair thanks in significant part to the continuing support of the Clan Society, to look forward to on Sunday.

There is other good news of course. First must come our success here in Scotland in finding our new Clan Secretary, Irene Cameron. Irene has tackled every challenge at the Clan Centre with skill, energy, a wealth of relevant expertise and unflinching good spirits and good humour.

Next is news from and around the diaspora. We felt that it would be wrong to ask the branches for reports to this AGM when nobody from overseas could get here to present them in person, and also not long after the circulation of what they had already written for the 2021 Clan Annual. Still, the gradual re-emergence recently of Highland Games and other Scottish events in North America, and their partial survival in Australia and New Zealand, as our International Vice Chair reports, is a chink of light at last. It is giving at least some of our Clansfolk a chance to show the flag publicly, to start the return to normal for which we are all longing, and to try to encourage new interest in Clan Donnachaidh.

There are of course branches with issues of lack of leadership candidates and/or ageing membership, but others are flourishing admirably and leading by example.

Of real significance too is the fact that our membership numbers, on which Irene will be reporting, are holding up well in the circumstances. However, achieving a major step-up in membership remains a constant challenge. A good deal of our energy over the past year has been spent on expanding contact with media entities, in order to grow publicity for the Clan and its history and for the Society's current or recent activities. Contacts have been active too with other bodies, both public and private, promoting interest in and visits to the Highlands of Scotland. Our local radio station Heartland Radio and its internationally read digital publication Iris is a case in point. Another is the still nascent concept of a "Jacobite Trail" through the Highlands. This has significant Scottish Government and other support, and we will be participating in a potentially significant follow-up meeting this coming November. We hope and believe that the Trail will include our own Museum.

One welcome event in recent weeks was the visit of a film crew to Struan, for a forthcoming series for the BBC on Scotland's Great Rivers. Their coverage of the River Garry, and of the people and places and stories along the river, will include both the historical importance of Clan Donnachaidh's "Poet Chief" and the quiet beauty of Struan Kirk, at the confluence of the Garry and the Errochty, and its surrounding countryside.

In closing this brief report, I acknowledge a large personal debt to not a few people who have been stalwart in their support this past year. They are too many to name, but they include in no particular order the Chief's son Alasdair, who along with some interesting new thinking for the future has recently introduced the latest recruit co-opted by your Council, Emma Reid, who both improves our gender imbalance on Council and brings financial expertise ; Brian Robertson, our marvellous webmaster; Jonn and Kathy Duncan, whose support has been steadfast and superb; Eddie Stewart, who took over from Billy Duncan during the past year as our nominee to the Struan Kirk Trust, and who tells me he has already secured our continuing place at next year's Pitlochry Games; and the ever-amazing Stephanie Robertson who continues to do so much for us in so many ways. Last, but as ever the very opposite of least, I must pay tribute to our Chief, who after much against his will missing last year's AGM is back with us at this year's, despite recently facing both illness and close family bereavement. His wise advice and calm encouragement is always there, and is hugely appreciated.

My own nine year stint on the Council comes to a close in March next year, so this AGM will be my last in the Chair. Your Council has its eyes on a younger successor, whose identity will be announced in due course, and who will I am sure lead the Society successfully through recovery from the last two years of treading water and on to a brighter future.

It has truly been a great honour to have served as your Chairman, and I thank the entire membership, my colleagues on the Council, and many good Clan Donnachaidh friends most sincerely for all their trust and support.

Gillespie Robertson
Chairman