

# Glorious Obsession:

*Scottish Indigenous Crafts Today*



clogs Ayrshire nees

Fair Isle

Shetland Lace

curling stones

tweed

g rugs

golf clubs

Sanquhar

knives chairs

## Foreword

This revised booklet is part of the Scottish Arts Council's commitment to supporting traditional arts and artists. First issued in 1997, it was the outcome of an independent survey carried out by Margaret Stuart, of those crafts which have their origins in the indigenous cultures of Scotland, and the related conference 'The New Makars: traditional crafts today'. The conference, held in Inverness in May 1996, brought together crafts practitioners and professionals from supporting sectors to discuss future directions for development.

The survey and conference revealed countrywide activity and a rich diversity of crafts which have a continuing tradition and a style distinctive to Scotland. Conversely, they also demonstrated that there was little public awareness of indigenous crafts.

*Glorious Obsession* aims to demonstrate some of the wealth of this aspect of Scottish culture, and to illustrate, through a selection of projects which have taken place around Scotland, how public understanding and opportunities for participation may be increased. The text, which has been updated, has three parts: an introduction which outlines the main findings of the survey, three case studies linking indigenous crafts to

education, tourism and economic development, and a contact section which lists sources of advice, information and support.

In conjunction with the National Museums of Scotland's touring exhibition *Celebration of Scottish Crafts* and the related CD-ROM, we hope that the booklet will inspire further initiatives to enhance enjoyment and appreciation of the indigenous crafts of Scotland.

The text was researched and written by Louise Butler with photographs by Shannon Tofts. We renew our thanks to the many individuals who offered their time, knowledge and views, both to this and the survey.



Tessa Jackson  
Director, the Scottish Arts Council  
May 2000



## Introduction



Demonstration of hand carding at The Shetland Textile Working Museum.

Indigenous crafts represent skills and trades originally acquired and practised out of necessity - they are a product of functional life. Historically they reflect locally available materials and resources and are part of Scottish regional and national cultural identity. Contemporary practice of these crafts is based on received traditions, making them distinct from the innovative and expressive crafts developed through the art colleges.

Today, these crafts offer a livelihood to a significant number of people and additionally represent an opportunity for promoting a positive image of Scotland's cultural inheritance. Recent initiatives in marketing and tourism clearly demonstrate the economic benefits to be gained from supporting traditional crafts.

### THE PRACTITIONERS:

The majority of indigenous craft practitioners are over 40 years of age, learned their skill in childhood and have continued to practise as an integral part of their everyday life. Others have turned from another career to crafts as a means of livelihood. A high number of makers are sole traders and many live in rural, often isolated locations, frequently for practical reasons connected with their craft. Spinners, weavers and knitters, for instance, may rear small flocks of sheep to provide their wool.

For the most part regional crafts are no longer exclusively made in their original geographic locations. Skills have transferred within the mobile society. The Royal Highland Show Handcrafts Competition annually attracts over five hundred entrants and it is here that many of the Scottish traditional crafts may be seen.

### EDUCATION:

Membership of crafts associations and guilds provides informal support for the exchange of skills and dissemination of information through newsletters, exhibitions, workshops, demonstrations, lectures, school visits and training courses.

In principle, education authorities are sympathetic to the cultural and educational importance of indigenous crafts. In practice there are no specific guidelines and **while Scots language, song and dance are taught in secondary schools throughout the country, there is little evidence of Scottish crafts in the timetable.** The exceptions are the Shetland Islands, where knitting is taught in all primary schools, and the Orkney Islands where Orkney-chairmaking, hand-spinning and knitting, wood-turning and basketwork are taught. Schools in the former Central Region include natural dyeing and tartan weaving within the 5-14 Environmental Studies curriculum. The Expressive Arts document aims to foster an understanding and interest in the pupil's own culture and specifically suggests investigation of Scotland's heritage through the traditional crafts, designs and patterns.



Spinning demonstration at The Shetland Textile Working Museum



Very often these skills are taught informally by teachers because of their own interest. SCOTVEC modules include weaving and knitting, though not necessarily to produce 'traditional' articles.

There are a number of potential sources of assistance for the development of arts in education projects. Through its National Lottery funds, the Scottish Arts Council operates schemes to encourage greater interest and participation in the arts and projects which involve children and young people. A third encourages apprenticeship and mentoring schemes for talented individuals. For small groups engaged in local activities, Awards for All, a joint programme set up by the Scottish Arts Council and other National Lottery funding distributors in Scotland, could offer support for workshops, courses and skills training for everyone, regardless of artistic ability. The New Opportunities Fund includes support for out-of-school-hours learning.

The Fèisean movement of tuition-based festivals, places emphasis on training in Gaelic language, music and song to children of primary school ages, although there is an increasing demand from older children and adults for similar training.

The craft of instrument making and repair is considered culturally and economically important and is also encouraged. Fèisean nan Gaidhail, produces a directory of tutors, issued free to all Fèisean members and updated every two years. The movement has had a positive effect, which continues to grow, and would make an excellent model for passing on the knowledge and practice of other indigenous crafts.

### PROMOTION AND MARKETING:

**A major area of concern for craft producers is making the link between product and customer. Where is the best marketplace? What price should be charged?**

As expertise in craft skills does not necessarily go hand in hand with commercial acumen, support in the form of training provision and business development is needed. This is a role that the local enterprise companies are in the best position to fulfil. Lomond Enterprise Partners on behalf of Dunbartonshire Enterprise, for example, is responsible for the Loch Lomond Crafts Association. The Association was formed in 1996 to foster creativity in craft work, offering training and business support to members and to assist in the promotion and marketing of craft work locally. The Association strives to establish a framework where local craft businesses can successfully flourish and grow, bringing a significant contribution to the region's economic development.



Trade fairs, taking place over 3-4 days bring buyers into direct contact with the makers. Stand costs can be very expensive for individuals, although in some areas local enterprise companies co-ordinate and subsidise group participation. Dumfries and Galloway Enterprise have supported shared stands for makers at gift trade fairs on a number of occasions. Participants found their joint presence created a beneficial regional identity and had far greater impact than if they had attended as individuals. At large fairs the crafts represented tend to be contemporary gift-ware crafts. There is scope to set aside an area for the promotion of more individual craft pieces at higher prices.



Dumfries and Galloway was the first area in Scotland to employ a full-time Craft Development Officer and the active crafts programme in that region is discussed in the accompanying case study.

**TOURISM:**

**Visitors cite Scottish people and culture as two of the most important reasons for coming to Scotland on holiday.** The Scottish Executive has published a New Strategy for Scottish Tourism which recognises the substantial part culture plays in Scotland's tourism economy and effectiveness. Culture is one of three niche markets identified as suitable for action at a national level, in partnership with the Scottish Arts Council and other cultural and heritage agencies. Promoting culture will involve making it more accessible to visitors, promoting activities in new and existing markets, and establishing local cultural 'trails'. An important development is that all Area Tourist



*Ardival Harps; Strathpeffer, Inverness-shire*

Boards' strategies will be reviewed by January 2001 to ensure they reflect the new priorities. This should bring greater recognition of the role of culture and tourism at a local level.

It is important to present a positive image of Scotland's culture, over and above tartan shortbread tins and the idyll of a spinner in traditional dress sitting outside the door of a thatched croft house. In the Highlands the Scottish Arts Council has worked with Highlands and Islands Enterprise (HIE) to develop an arts strategy which takes account of cultural tourism as a major contributor to the economic development of the region. SAC/HIE joint-funded the post of an Arts Development Officer, based at the HIE office in Inverness, to implement the strategy with particular reference to the Local Enterprise Council network.

**'The arts have a significant role to play in building the image of the area for tourism purposes and tourists thus attracted will gain a clear and positive image of the area and its culture beyond the negative stereotyping typical of tourism promotion elsewhere.'** (*Arts, Culture and Development - a Strategy for the Arts in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland, published HIE 1993*)

Very often the first interface with the visitor is through the Tourist Information Centre. Tourists want to know where they can see living Scottish traditions. This suggests opportunities for workshop visits and direct sales and also for selling craft goods in Tourist Information Centres. Makers would welcome group tourist board memberships and co-ordinated promotion of craft workers, for example, through the publication of regional craft maps, such as those produced by Uist Craft Producers in

the Western Isles, and in the Orkney Islands where businesses featuring in a craft trail guide are also brought to the attention of tourists by the positioning of roadside directional signs.

The Scottish Tourist Board's Strategic Plan highlights the question of seasonality which it intends to tackle by promoting Scotland, mainly within the UK, as an off-season destination for activity and special-interest short-break holidays. Craft businesses



*Joe Jackson, Crookmaker in his workshop.*

can take the initiative by running workshops and linking with local accommodation providers.

**Museums and galleries can also raise awareness of the significance of indigenous crafts to the cultural heritage of Scotland, through exhibitions, displays and demonstrations.**

In July 2000, an exhibition 'Celebrating Scotland's Crafts' opens at the Royal Museum and Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh, reviewing current practice of the indigenous crafts of Scotland. A festival of demonstrations and talks will take place daily in the museum, alongside the building of a traditional wooden boat, a Shetland 'Ness Yoal' by Ian Best of Fair Isle. A book and CD-ROM will complement the exhibition, which is funded by the National Museums of Scotland in partnership with the Scottish Arts Council and with sponsorship from Jean Muir Limited. The exhibition will tour to venues throughout Scotland over the following 18 months.

The accompanying case studies illustrate some of the positive work being undertaken in Scotland to sustain and promote contemporary indigenous crafts. In each case the outputs are measurable, from the benefits to individual makers and regional economies, to the invaluable marketing edge attained through the promotion of commodities which are inherently Scottish.

## Case study 1

### AN SGOTH NISEACH - THE NESS BOAT

*An Sgoth* is a one hour documentary film produced for BBC2 Scotland as part of their Gaelic service and was first broadcast in January 1995. The programme records the traditional boat building skills in the Hebrides, following the construction of a 'sgoth', from the felling of the timber to the launch of the finished boat.

The project grew from the shared vision of John Murdo MacLeod, master boatbuilder, and Sam Maynard, Director of *Eòlas*, an independent film production company based in Stornoway on the Isle of Lewis.

#### THE HISTORY:

The 'Sgoth Niseach' was the type of boat used in the Ness district on the north coast of Lewis, where there was a thriving cod and ling fishery during the latter decades of the 19th century. These clinker - built boats, the hull being constructed of overlapping planks, had an overall length of 33 feet; 21 feet on the keel with a curved rake on the bow and straight on the stern. The beam was 11' 3", the generous width necessary for buoyancy in the sea conditions in which they worked. The sgoths fished in the turbulent waters of the minches, between the isles and the mainland, and offshore to the north and west. They also took part in the annual gannet harvest, almost 30 miles out from their home ports of Ness and Skigersta. These were four-oared open craft, with four-sided sails (lug-sails) bent and suspended from a wooden yard, and whilst similar boats were built in Orkney, no area other than Ness had completely open boats of this size.

During this prosperous period there were 40-50 sgoths fishing out of Ness, with building berths at four locations, but when the fishing declined rapidly after 1900 the boat trade also fell. John Murdo's

grandfather built the last full-size Sgoth Niseach in 1918, whilst his father built a smaller version in 1935. The last sgoth sailed in 1947. Cheaper fibreglass craft and the increased use of diesel engines finally put paid to their use.

#### THE VISION:

**Aged 72 in 1994, John Murdo MacLeod was in retirement but, as sole custodian of the skills and language peculiar to the Sgoth Niseach trade, he held a dream of building a full-size boat that he thought would never be realised.**

Sam Maynard, himself from a Clyde shipbuilding family, shared this vision, realising that **if John Murdo's skills were not recorded and passed on then an important and unique part of Hebridean tradition would be lost. The project started in January 1994 as an 'act of faith' between the two men.**

Sam became the driving force in raising the considerable funds needed to embark on the boat. The BBC had agreed in principle to commission a half-hour documentary, later extended to one-hour, to film the building project over a one year period. This still left funds to be raised for the actual build. Western Isles Enterprise and the European LEADER I programme became interested because of the training element of the project, as John Murdo would need to recruit an assistant.

This post was advertised locally since the ideal candidate would need to be a Gaelic speaker who understood the Hebridean culture and terminology. Out of 40 applicants, many of whom were older people, Angus Smith was selected.



John Murdo MacLeod with 'An Sulaire', Stornoway



A time-served boatbuilder in his thirties, Angus had worked in the off-shore oil industry when after his apprenticeship he could not find work in the boat yards. He welcomed this new opportunity.

Western Isles Enterprise gave a grant of £12,000 to build 'An Sgoth' which was matched by funds from the LEADER I programme. The European Commission had launched the LEADER programme in late 1991, with the aim of making it possible for people living in rural areas, those categorised within Objective 1 or Objective 5b, to change and improve their circumstances by initiating their own development projects. **LEADER serves to emphasise distinctive cultural identity and to encourage pride in language, history and tradition. As an innovative community-driven venture, 'An Sgoth' encompassed all these aims.**

The boat was kept in the news through regular press bulletins issued from the Eòlas office. The rest of the funding necessary was gained over the year through tenacious fundraising, which attracted £ 15,295 in business and private donations - with an additional £ 8,000 of 'in kind' support, such as yacht varnish and half-price sails.



The building of 'An Sulaire'

#### THE REALISATION:

The first task was to select the timber for the larch over oak planking which was to form the construction of the boat. Timber for sgoths had historically been imported from the mainland and on this occasion came from the Cawdor Estate by Nairn, Inverness-shire. The Sitka spruce mast, however, was felled from the grounds of Lews Castle in Stornoway and ceremoniously carried by a team of thirty rugby players through the town to the boat shed, again providing a good photo-opportunity for the press.

Sgoths were usually built in the open air but this time a redundant Harris Tweed mill had been made available by a local businessman. As word spread and interest grew, a viewing gallery was installed and over 3,500 people, including school parties, came to view progress proving what a potent tourist attraction boat building could be. From this number of visitors a group of regular volunteers emerged to lend a hand with sanding, painting and other practical tasks.

**The boat touched the hearts of the community and a sense of ownership grew.** Sam Maynard insists the key to the success of the project was the level of trust from the community and also remarks that during the project he realised, 'that the making of the film had a contemporary perspective - we did not slip into the historical.'  
**The making of 'An Sgoth' was forward looking, not simply recording a window on the past.**

Looking to the future of the boat a public meeting was called in February 1994 with the aim of forming a Trust to take over ownership and management of the boat as an educational, tourist and promotional resource. The boat was successfully launched, named 'An Sulaire' (the gannet) by John Murdo MacLeod, on 3 December 1994, after twelve months of planning and a further twelve in the making. The film was broadcast on 5 January 1995. Those closely involved were mentally and physically stretched by that time and after this high point of achievement stepped back whilst the Trust fulfilled the continuing role.

An immediate outcome of the project was an interpretive exhibition, which opened at An Lanntair Gallery in Stornoway. 'An Sulaire' was taken to the Scottish Boat Show at the SECC, Glasgow, where it caused considerable interest, and later, with the exhibition as part of Fotofèis, to the Bonhoga Gallery at Weisdale Mill in Shetland with financial assistance from the Scottish Arts Council and local sponsors. **The additional value of bringing the boat to Shetland was the opportunity for people of different island cultures to share experience.**

#### THE FUTURE:

'An Sgoth' is a working legacy and the film a permanent record of the tradition - but what is the vision for 'An Sulaire' in the future?

In time, the Trust aims:

- to set up a traditional maritime centre, the major concern of which is to interpret the practicalities of this style of boatbuilding and the Hebridean tradition of working vessels;
- to build a series of smaller 18 foot racing vessels - 'sgoths';
- to ally to a proposed local timber skills centre and incorporate practical boat-building as a sales opportunity, means of training, educational resource for schools and tourist attraction;
- to keep 'An Sulaire' sailing regularly and maintain community involvement.

John Murdo is back in retirement. Angus Smith subsequently trained as a yachtmaster, assisted by Western Isles Enterprise funding and he has now become 'keeper' of the skills should future opportunities arise.

'An Sulaire' now sails regularly between the months of April and October each year and has made voyages to Iona, Mull and throughout the Uists, taking part in festivals and local events when possible. The Trust has since acquired another, lighter built boat (named 'Cuash', meaning 'cuckoo' in Old Gaelic) made by Sandy MacDonald of Ardnamurchan. This 19 foot vessel is more portable and easier for younger people to handle. The aim is to train more people in the skills of skippering a boat and, with practice, enable them to more readily handle the heavier 'An Sulaire', keeping her maintained and afloat.

The whole project has been an excellent co-operative venture between television, the community, private and public sectors.

Sam Maynard sums this up:

A  
tree  
two men  
dying craft  
last chance  
glorious obsession  
a love story in wood  
An Sgoth



#### Contacts:

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## Case study 2

### THE SHETLAND TEXTILE WORKING MUSEUM

The Shetland Textile Working Museum is an independent enterprise run by The Shetland Guild of Spinners, Weavers and Dyers. Opened in June 1996, **its seasonally changing exhibitions illustrate the rich island culture of spinning and knitting** through the display of garments, artefacts, photographs and by demonstration. Housed within the historic Weisdale Mill, where contemporary applied and visual arts are also shown, and strategically placed on a main route through the island, the museum is establishing itself as an interpretive centre and popular tourist destination.

#### THE WEISDALE MILL:

In 1985, a listed derelict grain mill, dating to 1855, was identified as having potential for use as an arts centre and knitwear museum. The Shetland Arts Trust, newly established by Shetland Islands Council, saw an opportunity and purchased the building for £10,500. Successful funding applications were made to the European Rural Development Fund and Shetland Amenity Trust, the latter explicitly for setting up a knitwear museum.

The Weisdale Mill needed extensive renovation and, whilst a Visual Arts Co-ordinator was appointed by the Trust in October 1993 and the first gallery exhibition opened the following April, the building only became fully operational during 1996.

The mill building has three floors. The top floor, the Bonhoga Gallery, is designated for exhibitions and shows the best of contemporary applied and visual arts, not necessarily from Shetland, in a variety of media, for the benefit of local people and visitors. The middle floor is a sales area, with a monthly changing selling exhibition.

The basement floor is leased to The Shetland Guild of Spinners, Weavers and Dyers to run the working textile museum. The cafeteria is separated from the museum room by a folding

wall, allowing for extended use as a textile workshop.

The Guild took occupation in June 1996 and the museum opened to the public within two weeks, on 19th June.

#### THE SHETLAND GUILD OF SPINNERS, WEAVERS AND DYERS:

The Shetland Guild of Spinners, Weavers and Dyers was established in 1988 with twelve members, a number which now stands at seventy including several overseas members, and is affiliated to the national Association of Guilds of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers. The constitutional aim of the Guild is to preserve and extend the knowledge of the traditional textile skills of Shetland.

Knitting in Shetland, using the soft wool of local sheep, can be traced back to the 16th century and was firmly established by the 17th century when knitted goods represented a valuable trading commodity. Spinning and weaving have a longer history still. Skills were passed down through generations by demonstration and word of mouth. Children acquired knitting skills from the age of three upwards and were expected to produce saleable items as part of their daily chores, in order to contribute to the family income. Most Shetland homes had a number of spinning wheels and the skills were taught in much the same way as knitting. The spinner had to learn how to select raw wool for quality, master the art of spinning various types of yarn, then carry this forward through the knitting process to a finished garment. A weaver was generally found in each district, but by the turn of the 20th century home weaving declined as a result of mechanisation. Before chemical dyes became available in Shetland, **knitters and weavers used the natural colour of the fleece or hand dyed their yarns to colours produced from natural ingredients such as, lichens, madder, onion skins and indigo. It is to preserve and interpret this rich heritage that the Shetland Textile Working Museum exists.**



Knitting instruction in the Shetland Islands





Spinning instruction in the Shetland Islands

#### THE MUSEUM:

The Guild, in order to establish the museum, set up their own charitable trust agreeing to certain conditions. In brief:

- to appoint an adviser in curatorial matters (presently the Museums' Section leader with the local council) since no Guild member was qualified or experienced in this field;
- to produce a written collecting policy, to be reviewed every 5 years;
- to maintain a collections register;
- to produce exhibitions, lectures etc for the advancement of education;
- to promote, encourage and undertake research into historic patterns, dyes and techniques and disseminate the results;
- to produce written documentation in support of the museum's work and collections.

This declaration and indeed the practical setting up of the museum gallery recognised Scottish Museums Council guidelines and the Guild is now working towards full museum registration in order to become eligible to borrow works from other collections. Initial funding for equipment, such as display and storage cabinets, was raised by the Guild, with additional sums from both private and public sources including:

- Shetland Islands Council:**
- Leisure and Recreation Department**
- Foundation for Sport and the Arts**
- Shetland Arts Trust**
- The Scottish Arts Council**
- Shetland Enterprise**
- Shetland Amenity Trust**

Continuing funds are raised through members subscriptions, charges for workshops and other Guild services, entry charge to the museum for adults, private donations and public funding.

The Guild has identified textiles available for loan from local private collections, mostly in members hands, and calls on these as required, in addition to items that have already been gifted to its own collection, now stored at the museum. Replicas fill gaps in the chronological display along with examples of recent competition work. Representative items in the first exhibition included fine handspun lace shawls, richly patterned Fair Isle jumpers, traditional woollen clothing (fishermen's working clothing, stockings), Taatit rugs (bed covers made of long, hand-dyed tufts of wool hooked into a woven coarse wool ground). These are displayed to allow close study of the inherent textures, patterns and variety of stitch. There will be one major change of exhibition each year between May and October and smaller exhibitions between November and April.

The museum is open to visitors on four and half days per week. Whilst staffing on the Sunday, half-day, is covered voluntarily by a Guild member, the other days are worked by a paid member of staff. Half the cost of this salary, for the first season, was paid by the Scottish Arts Council.

The person employed is a Shetlander, a qualified teacher and Guild member, who learned to knit before she went to school. The job encompasses general housekeeping, cataloguing and communications, but most importantly giving demonstrations to the public so that visitors can see and discuss work in progress during their visit. This has proved to be a very popular and valuable aspect of the museum. The museum attracts around 2,500 visitors during its open season between April and October each year.





Several groups have visited from the USA, Canada and Japan, brought by tour operators. The Guild sees the potential for growth in this group market, both UK and overseas.

The Museum is promoted through the national guild association and their journal. Otherwise a colour leaflet about the museum and its work is distributed through the Tourist Information Centre network. Main road signposting improvements are soon to be introduced.

Other educational activities, open to members and visitors alike, are held by the Guild around the islands in local halls. These encompass spinning, handknitting, and rug-making and are an important means of communicating and continuing the Shetland tradition. These sessions are increasingly important now that the local further education college summer schools have been discontinued. **Knitting continues to be taught as part of the curriculum in primary schools by peripatetic instructors employed by Shetland Islands Council Education Department.**

#### THE FUTURE:

**The Guild's vision for the Shetland Textile Working Museum is to expand as a craft centre with use of outbuildings to house full size looms and demonstrate weaving skills - to truly become 'a living resource'.**

#### Contacts:

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Weavers and Dyers  
c/o The Shetland Textile Working  
Museum  
Weisdale Mill  
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(answering machine out of season)

Shetland Arts Trust  
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## Case study 3

### THE CRAFT DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE IN DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY

**The very successful Craft Development Initiative in Dumfries and Galloway is unique to Scotland.** Initially a two year project, it was set-up to run from June 1994 to June 1996 and was funded, more or less equally, by Dumfries and Galloway Council, Dumfries and Galloway Enterprise and the Scottish Arts Council. The initiative also attracted European Regional Development Fund money under Objective 5b, eligible within both the Business Development and Tourism categories. Further European funds have since been attracted allowing extension both in time and scope to the overall project. The initiative centres on the appointment of a Crafts Development Officer who operates region-wide.

#### THE OBJECTIVES:

The key objectives of the initiative are to:

- establish and maintain a network of craftworkers within the region, encouraging information exchange and self-help;
- establish a craft information bank and advisory service which supports individual craft workers and the craft community at large, including existing craft groups and societies;
- develop individual and collaborative projects to help market, promote and exhibit crafts from the region both locally and nationally;
- assess training needs and deliver a programme of seminars/courses in key skills such as, marketing, sales, design and business development.

#### THE SUPPORT:

The Crafts Development Officer meets the objectives of the initiative in a number of ways.

Whilst the initiative offers no direct financial help to makers, the Crafts Development Officer can apply to Dumfries and Galloway Council for support funding for individual or group craft projects - or will route applicants to other grant-making bodies. Regular craft exhibitions are organised or coordinated throughout the region. Further small-scale craft displays are arranged in local libraries and hotels, using lockable showcases commissioned through additional funds attracted to the scheme. These, coupled with group participation at national trade fairs, such as the Made in Scotland January gift fair at Glasgow's SECC, have served to raise public and trade awareness, developing a reputation for high quality work from the region.

The Gracefield Arts Centre is a focal point for the makers, providing access to a reference bank of literature and specialist publications, meeting space and opportunities for networking with other makers. The Centre's craft shop generated just under £24,000 of sales in its first year, a figure which doubles if sales directly generated by the regional crafts trade guide are taken into account. Turnover continues to rise and credit card payment facilities have now been introduced.

**Response to the training events has been positive, with a good number of makers attending each session. A very practical approach is taken and feedback from evaluation questionnaires shows that people are able to extend their skills very quickly in this way and have appreciated sharing problems and finding solutions with their peers.**

The *Crafts Quarter* newsletter is distributed region-wide giving information on local and national events, competitions, awards and opportunities and generally keeps everyone in touch with current craft affairs. Of the 2,000 copies printed, half are circulated by direct mail and just over 300 of these go to artists and makers.



Lizzie Farey, basketmaker, Castle Douglas, Dumfries and Galloway.

The full-colour trade guide to crafts from Dumfries and Galloway now in its third edition features the products of 85 individual makers. On publication it was distributed nationally by direct mail to 6,000 retail shops, gallery venues, foreign embassies, architectural practices and craft societies. An additional 3,000 copies have been handed out at trade events and by the makers themselves. A guide to the retail craft outlets of the area has also been printed, with a distribution of 14,000 through the makers, venues and Tourist Information Centres region-wide.

#### THE INDIGENOUS CRAFTS:

Whilst as a policy no distinction is made between the varying crafts of the region, tribute has been paid to the traditional crafts of this south-west area of Scotland through the



Crookmaking in Dumfries and Galloway

production of a separate illustrated leaflet for clogs, baskets and knitting. In the text, the root of these three local crafts is explained - providing a stark contrast between a thriving clog-making industry in 1851, when 58% of Scottish clogmakers lived in this area, to the one remaining clog-making company left in Scotland,

in Balmaclellan. Three basketmakers, members of the Scottish Basketmakers Circle, locally produce traditional and new random forms in willow, and hedgerow materials.

Also represented in the leaflet is the fine and uniquely patterned Sanquhar knitting, in the 1700s a flourishing industry with articles exported from the village to the American Colonies. The *People's Friend* magazine (April 1955) and The Scottish Womens Rural Institute (between 1966 and 1980) published some of the patterns, which are still in use and have helped this craft to survive. Otherwise, articles are still available commercially only through one or two local knitters.

#### THE BENEFITS:

**The economic benefits of this craft initiative are easily demonstrated. The level of crafts sales has already been mentioned, but the visitor figures to Gracefield Arts Centre increased by 11%, coinciding with the opening of the crafts shop and successful exhibitions programme.**

Eight new craft businesses have been established in the area with the direct advisory assistance of the Crafts Development Officer, in conjunction with other Council departments and partner agencies. Newly qualified makers are returning or moving to the region knowing that they will find the mechanisms in place to assist them in their business. The number of jobs safeguarded exceeds 20.

**The quality of the regions tourism product has been greatly enhanced. Six new retail outlets promoting regional crafts have been established and 50% of existing shops now stock local craft goods.**





#### THE FUTURE:

Consolidation of the results achieved so far will continue and further development work will be carried out. For instance, the Trade Guide is already accessible on the Internet and orders and enquiries are regularly received by this means. Future aims will include larger national touring exhibitions, perhaps with the assistance of private sector sponsorship. Teachers and community groups will be encouraged to use the craft gallery exhibitions as an educational resource with involvement of the region's makers, and summer schools should be reintroduced. **Another initiative, again encouraging support for young makers and inward investment, is 'Room for Crafts'**. Schools and community centres able to offer workshop space free of charge to makers are able to exchange this for a half or full days teaching per week by the resident crafts person. The Craft Development Officer acts as the agent for these partnerships.

**A key development area of the initiative is the use of indigenous raw materials.** Stage One of a feasibility study carried out in 1997 has led to the planting of willow at three pilot sites across the region. These species trials will determine suitability for use in basket-making and bio-mass. Stage Two will explore the setting up of a centre for willow work, education, information and sales. The aim is to investigate new practical and creative uses of willow, developing collaborative links between landscape and environmental professionals and creative artists. A willow residency in 1997, in partnership with Dumfries and Galloway Arts Association, successfully brought together an innovative

environmental artist and basket-makers from the region. The residency stimulated the creation of new work and opportunities for the artist to liaise with schools, adults and community groups, improving the understanding of working in willow and raising awareness of the local resource.

The vision is the establishment of a centre for crafts excellence within Dumfries and Galloway, focussing on the growth and use of natural raw materials, supporting primary source to end product, whilst developing economic benefits to the area. Given the ground covered by the Crafts Development Initiative so far, with continued funding, this is an achievable goal.

#### Contacts:

Craft Development Officer  
Gracefield Arts Centre  
28 Edinburgh Road  
Dumfries DG1 1JQ

Tel: 01387 262084  
Fax: 01387 255173

# Sources of information

## Sources of information

#### The Scottish Arts Council

12 Manor Place  
Edinburgh  
EH3 7DD  
Tel: 0131 226 6051  
fax: 0131 225 9833  
Help Desk: 0131 240 2443 and 2444  
(open Monday-Friday  
10am-12 noon, 2-4pm)  
e-mail: help.desk@scottisharts.org.uk  
website: www.sac.org.uk

The Scottish Arts Council Help Desk through its direct line numbers, provides a single access point to a wide range of information, drawing on the knowledge of SAC staff, in-house databases and an extensive library to answer a diverse range of enquiries.

Please contact the Help Desk to obtain a copy of the *Information Directory : A Guide to Information, Advice and Services from the Scottish Arts Council*. The Directory provides a comprehensive listing of the resources available from SAC, many of them free of charge, including a section relating specifically to Crafts and the Visual Arts.

The Help Desk is also the first point of contact for information on the Scottish Arts Council's own funding schemes, including funds available through the National Lottery. The Crafts Department at the Scottish Arts Council is able to give more detailed information on schemes of assistance.



#### CRAFTS GUILDS AND ASSOCIATIONS:

##### Lace Guild

The Hollies  
53 Audnam  
Stourbridge  
West Midlands DY8 4AE  
Tel: 01384 390739  
Fax: 01384 444415  
Contact: Margaret Watts,  
Office Co-ordinator

##### Lace Guild - Scottish Representative

33 Clevedon Road  
Glasgow G12 0PH  
Tel: 0141 334 2802  
Contact: Jean Leader,  
Chairman of the Lace Guild  
and Scottish Representative

##### Scottish Association of Woodturners

3 Dundas Avenue  
North Berwick EH39 4PS  
Tel: 01620 892293  
Contact: George Hunter, Secretary

##### Scottish Basketmakers Circle

8 Threave Road  
Rhonohouse  
Castle Douglas  
Kircudbrightshire DG7 1TD  
Tel: 01556 680473  
Contact : Lizzie Farey, Secretary

##### Scottish Crookmakers Association

9 Cauldside  
Canonbie  
Dumfriesshire DG14 0RT  
Tel: 013873 71297  
Contact: Davina Hope, Secretary

**Association of Guilds of Weavers,  
Spinners and Dyers**

2 Bower Mount Road  
Maidstone  
Kent ME1 68AU  
Contact: Anne Dixon,  
Honorary Secretary

**Shetland Guild of Spinners,  
Weavers and Dyers**

c/o The Shetland Textile Working  
Museum  
Weisdale Mill  
Weisdale  
Shetland ZE2 9LW  
Tel: 01595 830419  
(answering machine out of season)

**Taigh Chearsabagh**

Lochmaddy  
North Uist  
Western Isles PA82 5AA  
Tel: 01876 500293  
Contact: Norman MacLeod,  
Manager. Promotes and  
encourages arts in the Uists.

**The Camanachd Association**

The Camanachd Association  
Algarve  
Badabrie  
Banavie  
Fort William PH33 7LX  
Tel: 01397 772 772  
Fax: 01397 772 255  
E-mail:  
executive@camanachd.freemove.co.uk  
Contact: Alistair MacIntyre,  
Executive Officer



**The Quilters Guild**

Room 190, Dean Clough  
Business Centre  
Halifax HX3 5AX  
Tel: 01422 347669  
Fax: 01422 345017  
Contact: The Administrator

**The Quilters Guild-Scottish  
Coordinator**

21 Main Street  
St Ninians  
Stirling FK7 9AW  
Tel: 01786 462794  
E-mail: lizfergu@yahoo.com  
Contact: Liz Ferguson

**OTHER SOURCES**

**Awards for All**

4 Shore Place  
Leith  
Edinburgh  
EH6 6UU  
Tel: 0870 606 1473

**Made in Scotland Ltd**

Station Road  
Beaully  
Inverness-shire IV4 7EH  
Tel: 01463 782578  
Fax: 01463 782409  
E-mail: mis@enterprise.net  
Contact: Kathleen Hardie,  
Managing Director

**The New Opportunities Fund**

Highlander House  
58 Waterloo Street  
Glasgow G2 7DA  
Tel: 0845 0000123

**The Royal Highland and  
Agricultural Society**

Royal Highland Centre  
Ingliston  
Edinburgh EH28 8NF  
Tel: 0131 333 2444  
Fax: 0131 333 5236  
Contact: Hilary Adams,  
Handcrafts Officer



**The Scottish Museums Council**

County House  
20 - 22 Torphichen Street  
Edinburgh EH3 8JB  
Tel: 0131 229 7465  
Fax: 0131 229 2728  
Contact: Jane Furness,  
Information Officer

**Scottish Tourist Board**

23 Ravelston Terrace  
Edinburgh EH4 3EU  
Tel: 0131 332 2433  
Fax: 0131 343 2023  
Contact: Heather Akroyd,  
Arts & Tourism Coordinator

**Scottish Enterprise**

120 Bothwell Street  
Glasgow G2 7JP  
Tel: 0141 248 2700  
Fax: 0141 221 3217

The Scottish Enterprise network  
consists of thirteen independent  
LECs. Highlands and Islands  
Enterprise, which has a broader  
remit than Scottish Enterprise  
including responsibility for social  
development, comprises ten LECs.

**Highlands and Islands Enterprise**

Bridge House  
20 Bridge Street  
Inverness IV1 1QR  
Tel: 01463 234171  
Fax: 01463 244469  
E-mail: hie.general@hient.co.uk

**HI Arts**

Bridge House,  
20 Bridge Street  
Inverness IV1 1QR  
Tel: 01463 244300  
Fax: 01463 244331  
Contact: Robert Livingston,  
Development Officer

For information on European,  
national and regional crafts  
support schemes and other  
initiatives, please contact the  
Business Shop at your local  
enterprise company.



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**Our aim** – to play our part in creating a dynamic arts environment which values the artist and enhances the quality of life for the people of Scotland

**The Scottish Arts Council**

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e-mail: [help.desk@scottisharts.org.uk](mailto:help.desk@scottisharts.org.uk)  
website: [www.sac.org.uk](http://www.sac.org.uk)