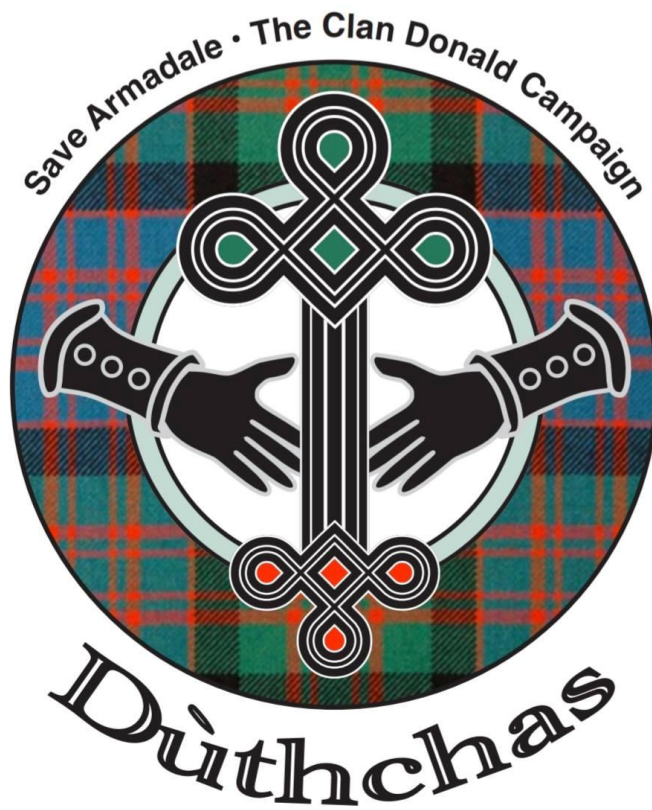


Dualchas Prìseil

Report on the Heritage Assets of Clan Donald Lands Trust, Armadale, Sleat, Isle of Skye



Clan Donald Lands Trust: A Precious Heritage

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Introduction

This report has been compiled by the Save Armadale – The Clan Donald Campaign Heritage Working Group.

Its aim is to draw attention to nationally important heritage assets held by the Clan Donald Lands Trust (CDLT) at Armadale, Isle of Skye, Scotland which are under imminent threat due to the actions of the CDLT Trustees.

This paper presents the case as to why there is an urgent need for these assets to be safeguarded, the jeopardy which they are under due to the actions of the Trustees, and why they should be considered of national importance.

We contend that the planned sale and break-up of these assets, and removal from Armadale on the Sleat peninsula, is an act of supreme cultural vandalism which should be resisted and challenged by all who care about Scotland's cultural heritage.

Please note: This is an updated version of a previous report. Its scope has been extended to provide more detail about the natural heritage of the Gardens at Armadale – an important and wonderful asset which is also at risk.

Members of Working Group:

Janet Dorr, Colorado, USA; Clan Donald USA

Richard Flood, Texas, Clan Donald USA, Clan Donald Society Scotland

Carol McDonald Thomson, Volunteer Archaeologist at Govan Stones Museum, Glasgow, Scotland; Descendant of Clan Donald

Mike MacDonald, Clan Donald member, North Carolina, USA

Seonaid McDonald, Archivist, Isle of Lewis, Scotland; niece of a founding member of the Clan Donald Lands Trust

July 2025

Version 4

1. Executive Summary

On 24th March 2025, the Trustees of the Clan Donald Lands Trust (CDLT) announced that they had made the decision to sell the land and property assets of Clan Donald, on the Isle of Skye, including Armadale Castle and the wider estate. The association of Clan Donald with Skye dates to the early 15th century.

Armadale Castle, Gardens, Museum of the Isles, Library and Archive, Stables and other important listed buildings – situated on the last remaining Clan Donald lands on the Sleat peninsula - are under imminent threat of being broken up and sold off by the CDLT Trustees – the very individuals who should be protecting and nurturing these assets.

We believe these assets should be retained and safeguarded, as a cohesive whole, to preserve and protect them, and to ensure that they continue to be accessible to the public as a significant part of our history as a nation.

We argue that these assets are of sufficient cultural value to the history of Scotland that they merit and deserve the protection of, and stewardship by, a suitable trusted organisation.

The Lands, Castle and Gardens are historically significant based on Historic Environment Scotland's classifications, as we detail below. These Lands were purchased for the Trust in 1971 through donations by Clan Donald members at home and across the world. The siting of all of these assets together in the ancestral lands of Clan Donald is a crucial factor in their overall heritage value.

Furthermore, Armadale Castle Gardens has magnificent trees dating from the early 19th century and recently participated in the prestigious Trees for the Future Project which saw Armadale being selected as a satellite garden to care for some of the world's rarest trees. Additionally, there are more than 400 memorial trees in the grounds, and numerous other memorials.

The prospect of the Museum being sold immediately raises the question of the future of its historically important heritage collections, as well as its future as a publicly accessible visitor attraction, with all the social, cultural, educational and economic benefits this brings to the Sleat peninsula.

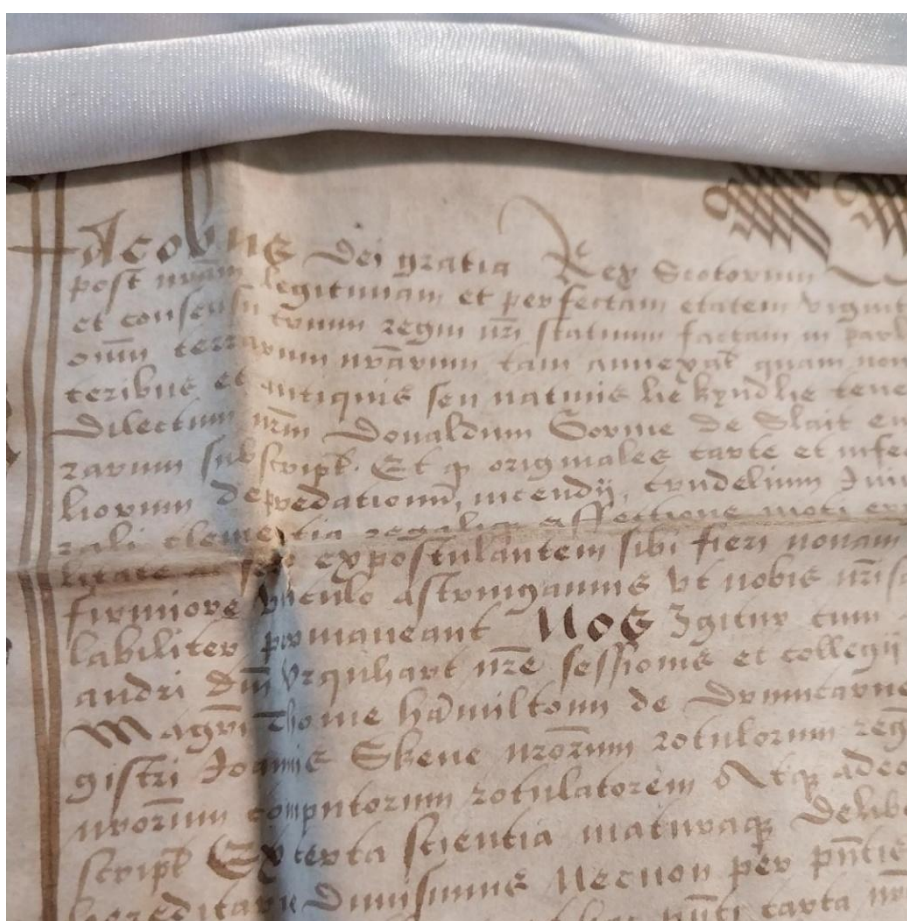
The first Charitable Purpose of the CDLT under its Deed of Trust is:

‘Operating and maintaining the Clan Museum on the Clan Lands in the Island of Skye for the purpose of fostering Clan sentiment and interest and the encouragement of education of members of the Clan and the general public in the history of the Highland Clans and the Clan Donald in particular and the collection and preservation of records and traditions and objects of historic interest bearing on the history of Clan Donald.’

It is very clear that the CDLT Trustees' actions represent the dismantling of a precious resource, the betrayal of the Charity's Deed of Trust and their ethical duty to care for museum objects in trust in perpetuity (the definition of a museum), and the betrayal of all those Clan Donald members and organisations worldwide, who have supported the CDLT in the last 50+ years either financially or by bequests and donations of historically important documents or artefacts.

The Archive and Library collections - including the MacDonald Estate papers (1473-1992) - are in danger. In a series of public announcements, the CDLT Trustees have stated that the museum collections are not for sale and that they plan to retain the archive and library (**see Appendix 1**). However, this raises the question of where the collections will be housed, if the current building is sold off, and the level of public access that would be provided. It also raises the question of whether the appropriate standards of archive accommodation would be created to house these valuable collections, as archives have very specific requirements to ensure their permanent preservation.

It is our contention that the CDLT Trustees, in taking this drastic step to sell off the Lands and historical assets for which they are meant to be responsible, are acting in a reckless manner which represents cultural vandalism and goes against the charity's core Charitable Purpose. If urgent action is not taken, there is a real risk that these assets will be broken up, disassociated from the land to which they belong, and lost to the nation forever.



Charter from James VI restoring lands in Skye and North Uist to Donald Gorm of Slait, Aug 1596 (detail) (NRAS3273/2/1)

2. Historic and heritage value of assets at risk: overview based on HES designations

2.1 Historic Environment Scotland (HES) designations

HES is responsible for designating sites and places at the national level. These designations encompass Scheduled monuments, Listed buildings, Inventory of gardens and designed landscapes and Inventory of historic battlefields.

HES maintains this inventory of Scotland's most important gardens and designed landscapes under the terms of the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979. Sites of national importance are added to the inventory using the selection guidance published in [Designation Policy and Selection Guidance \(2019\)](#).

The information in HES's inventory record relating to Armadale gives an indication of the **national importance** of the sites. The relevant HES Designations are as follows:

Armadale Castle (what survives) – is a Grade B listed building

<https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/apex/f?p=1505:300:::::VIEWTYPE,VIEWREF:designation,LB14003>

Armadale Castle Stables - is a Grade A listed building

<https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/apex/f?p=1505:300:::::VIEWTYPE,VIEWREF:designation,LB14004>

Armadale Castle Gardens and Designed Landscape

This is designated by Historic Environment Scotland (HES) as having an **Outstanding** level of historical interest, a **High** level of Horticultural value, an **Outstanding** level of architectural interest, and an **Outstanding** level of Scenic interest. There is also a **High** value for Nature Conservation due to the woodland and coastal habitats.

There are four areas designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) on CDLT's estates. These are Coille Dalavil, Coille Thògabhaig, Àird Thuirinisand Bàgh Tharsgabhaig.

Despite the derelict condition of the Castle, the designed landscape provides the setting for the A listed Stable-block and other interesting architectural features such as the Gothic Bridge (constructed 1825) and the Laundry.

To quote from HES's assessment:

'The associations with the Clan Donald over many centuries and the existence of some historical records at Armadale give it outstanding value in this category...

The existence of records of an early arboretum, replanted in the 1870s and currently being replanted [as at 1987], gives it high Horticultural value.'

<https://portal.historicenvironment.scot/apex/f?p=1505:300:::::VIEWTYPE,VIEWREF:designation,GDL00028>

The following are all **Grade B** listed:

- Ardvassar Former Porter's Lodge To Armadale Castle
- Bridge By Armadale Castle
- Armadale Castle Home Farm, The High Square

Armadale Castle Laundry is **Grade C** listed.

2.2 The importance of the connection of Armadale, Sleat with Clan Donald

Clan Donald can trace their associations with Skye to the early 15th century. The first record of a house at Armadale was in 1690 when it was burned down in reprisal for the Macdonald support of the Jacobite cause. This earlier house is thought to have been sited further west than the present Castle. The Macdonald lands were forfeited in the early 18th century but restored to the laird's grandson, Alexander, in 1727, and the Factor, Hugh MacDonald, lived on the estate while the laird lived at Duntulm.

Flora MacDonald

Hugh Macdonald married the mother of Flora MacDonald and Flora visited them at Armadale after smuggling Prince Charles to Portree on Skye. In 1750 she married the Macdonald of Kingsburgh's son at Armadale.

In 1766, Alexander Macdonald died and was succeeded by his son Alexander, 1st Baron of Macdonald, who was then succeeded by his son Alexander in 1795. It was he who undertook the improvement of the estate, and in 1815 James Gillespie Graham was commissioned to design a new Castle, built onto the existing mansion house, and facing south-east across the Sound of Sleat. The area in front of the new building was levelled to enhance the fine views across to the mainland. After a fire in the central part of the mansion house in 1850, David Bryce was commissioned to extend the Castle for Godfrey the 4th Baron.

In 1925 the 6th Baron moved to the former Dower House at Ostaig House, and eventually the Castle was put on the market in 1971 when it was purchased by the **Clan Donald Lands Trust**. By this time the west part of the Castle was derelict and in 1981 it was demolished; remnants were saved, and the Bryce part of the Castle, although empty, has been saved with a view to future restoration.

In 1984 the Stables were converted into a Visitor Arrival Building for the Clan Centre. The design for the stables won 'The Regeneration of Scotland' Award for Architecture in 1985.



19th century map of Armadale (detail)

3. Natural heritage: Garden and woodland assets

3.1 Background

Armadale Castle Gardens has a magnificent tree collection which dates from the early 19th century. It should be noted that the HES assessment was done in 1987, and there have been significant developments in the decades since. An expert with in-depth knowledge of the Gardens has advised us that the trees, in particular, merit special attention as a crucial aspect of the Armadale site, and that the quality of the Gardens is at least comparable with those at Inverewe. **(See also separate Tree Notes document by Andrew Peters)**

Woodland is at a premium in Skye – there are no notable areas of woodland except at Dunvegan and Armadale. Many of the trees have Tree Protection Orders on them and are historically significant. This woodland environment creates a habitat for a whole range of flora and fauna and therefore represents an incredibly precious resource.

In the 40-acre garden, as well as shrubs and flowers, there are magnificent trees such as the Giant Redwood, Sitka Spruce and Silver Fir; acers and red oak; a Victorian arboretum with specimen trees such as the Monkey Puzzle and Noble Fir and unusual trees such as the ‘Candy Floss tree’ and ‘fossil tree’.

Parts of the Garden date to the 1790s, when the original mansion house was built. Substantial remodelling took place in the 1820s when the area in front of the new Castle building was levelled to create outstanding views across the Sound of Sleat to the Knoydart peninsula on the mainland. The Victorian arboretum has some incredibly fine rare specimens, mostly planted in the 1870s.

In the 1970s, the Trust instigated a programme to clear overgrowth of rhododendron and scrub around the garden, and the reinstatement of the original paths. There were over a hundred recorded specimen trees at Armadale at the turn of the century, many of them planted in the 1870s but a few, particularly the specimens of silver fir (*Abies alba*) are thought to have been planted c.1800. The area east of the Castle is lawn; to the north of this part of the garden is a viewpoint with a seat and a small rock garden, beyond which is a path leading to the nature trail. The policy woodlands had been left unmanaged for some years [pre-1987 when HES assessment written]; they contain sycamore, beech, birch and lime species and form the backdrop for more woodland walks.

The main drive to the Castle 'Broad Walk' was planted up with a lime avenue in 1820 and some of the original limes remain. There have been later additions of Thuja and monkey puzzle trees along the drive, and some new planting of Sorbus and Fuchsia occurred c.1987. Waterlily ponds, herbaceous borders and terrace walks combined with the magnificent trees, and carpets of bluebells and orchids in spring and summer, make these Gardens a wonderful place.

A detailed tree survey was conducted by Gardens staff in 2019-20, which aimed to identify all the trees requiring protection, maintenance and conservation. This resulted in a 40-page report containing recommendations on the future management of the trees, and a programme had been under way to take this important work forward.

3.2 Trees for the Future Project

In addition to the programme of work referred to above, the Trees for the Future Project was an exciting initiative which saw Armadale being selected as an official Satellite Garden for the conifer conservation programme. The project was a collaboration with the prestigious [International Conifer Conservation Programme](#) at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE).

Starting in 2021 the project aimed to plant the next generation of trees in the gardens over the following three years, while at the same time protecting some of the world's most endangered species. Members of the public were invited to 'adopt a tree' to show support. The donation to Armadale for this project was extraordinarily generous. RBGE donated 140 young conifers, along with materials for planting.

Armadale was one of a network of what were considered 'safe sites', specially chosen because of having the right conditions and horticultural skills to care for a living collection of endangered trees, many of which are rare and threatened in their native habitat. These were initially grown in Edinburgh from seeds collected in the wild under strictly controlled licence arrangements. The project got off to a promising start when two rare trees were planted to mark the 50th anniversary of the CDLT on 31st July 2021. (See film of this event here: [Celebrating 50 years of Clan Donald Lands Trust](#)).

This Report's authors are aware of around 30 to 40 of the trees provided by RBGE for the project having been planted, but we don't know what happened in relation to the follow-up work after November 2021. Some of the donated trees, threatened in the wild, are to all intents and purposes irreplaceable.

With the correct management, care and vision, there is the potential for the Gardens to become a significant attraction, on a par with Inverewe Gardens. A plan to deliver just such an ambitious vision was under way, with the full support of the Trustees at that time, including the start on a new arboretum.

A curt statement on the website (as at July 2025) reads: 'The Trees for the Future project has successfully completed its intended work and is no longer an active project.'
(<https://armadalecastle.com/explore/gardens/trees-for-the-future/>)

We would argue that this statement shows a complete disregard for the significance of this project and the need for the continuing expert care which these rare trees require to ensure their survival for future generations. It is our contention that the Woodland in particular should be classed as an asset of national importance which is making a contribution to tree conservation at international level. Such a precious resource needs to be protected and nurtured for future generations and should remain open to the public.

There are a number of articles and videos available online which provide ample evidence of the quality and value of the Armadale Gardens and Woodland, as listed below:

- <https://www.countrylife.co.uk/gardens/country-gardens-and-gardening-tips/the-gardens-of-armadale-castle-clan-donalds-crumbling-magnificent-retreat-tucked-into-a-corner-of-the-isle-of-skye-227474>
- [Tree Tour with Andrew Peters](#) [film]
- [Talking Trees: In conversation with conifer expert Martin Gardner](#) [film]
- [Autumn Tree Tour Part 1](#) [film]
- [Autumn Tree Tour Part 2](#) [film]
- [Spring flowers at Armadale Castle](#) [film]
- [Autumn colour in the gardens](#) [film]
- See also separate document 'Tree Notes' by Andrew Peters

3.3 Memorial Trees

This scheme began in the 1970s. There are around 450 memorial trees at Armadale which were identified and surveyed as part of the work undertaken by former Gardens staff in 2019-2020. All the memorial trees were recorded with donation date, location, contact details (where available), species and maintenance requirements. It was noted that many of the trees needed remedial works. This list is held by the CDLT and is therefore not available for this Report, but we have identified the following memorial trees to date, from information in the public domain:

- John S. MacDonald (1982) (*Davidia involucrata* - Dove tree)
- Jean Robertson (d. Aug. 1991) (*Acer tataricum ginnala* - Tatar Maple)
- Miriam Michelle Thomann (1987) (*Betula utilis* - Himalayan Birch)
- Lucy Watkins (2019) (*Quercus Coccinia* - Scarlet Oak)
- The Tormore Tree (1984)
- Steven & Wendy Sandy 1990 (m. 28 4 1990) (*Hoeheria glabrata* - Mountain Ribbon Wood, New Zealand)
- 1983 Memorial (photo available but not the name)
- Family of Rob Ware paid to have 4 trees planted in 2012, in memory of the following:
 - Dorothy May Ware. A lady who loved life. (Rob's mother)
 - Ronald Ware (Rob's father)
 - Emily Kitson (Rob's grandmother)
 - Allan Disney (Rob's uncle)
- Jenny Olerenshaw: her family has a tree near the stables in memory of Jack Barton
- https://www.electricscotland.com/pictures/ross/images/Img_0051a1.jpg - In Memory of Vice Admiral Sir Roderick MacDonald KBE 1921-2001

Despite the existence of the detailed list done by the former Gardens staff, we are aware of at least one family member with four memorial trees planted having received emails from the current CEO seeking clarification of the presence of his trees.

Aside from the ethical questions arising in relation to the sale of Gardens which contain memorials, the decision by the CDLT Trustees to dispose of Armadale raises questions about the legality of having taken monies from families to plant or dedicate memorial trees to honour loved ones. Those who purchased these trees would rightly expect that these would be nurtured, and continue to be part of a Garden and Woodland to be retained for public benefit in perpetuity. We are not aware of any communication with donors regarding the impact the sale will have on their tree and their ability to visit to remember their loved ones.

Please see Appendix 2 for photos of some of the memorial trees and memorials

3.4 Other memorials

Aside from the memorial trees, there are memorial stones, plaques and benches throughout the Gardens. Armadale is considered the 'spiritual home' of Clan Donald and members of the clan, and others who have a deep connection with the place, have memorials there. Some families have also scattered the ashes of their loved ones there.

Among other clan members whose passing is commemorated on the estate, The Hon. Janet Macdonald, sister of Lord Macdonald, is interred in the Gardens.

The proposed sale by the Trustees is an affront to the memory of these people, and deeply grievous to surviving family members, all of whom have supported the Clan Donald Lands Trust in its goal of retaining the lands in perpetuity and being a custodian of these resources.

There are also memorial benches throughout the Gardens. An enquiry by a family member into the whereabouts of a bench for George T. MacDonald, Founding Member of the Clan Donald Lands Trust, which had been moved from its original location, was not responded to. This has since been located, thanks to a member of the community.

Located in the Gardens, there is a sculpture gifted by the clan - the Raven's Rock Memorial – in memory of Air Commodore Donald MacDonell of Glengarry (1913–1999), CB, DFC by Gerald Laing. (See section 4.9 for more information on this.)

This article refers to the unveiling of the Rosa MacDonald memorial wall:
<https://clandonald.nz/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/CD-News-Spring2010.pdf>

The restoration of the historic bridge in the Gardens was completed in 1997 thanks to the generosity of Catherine Teague Matthews who funded the project in memory of her mother.

In the old Laundry there are stones inscribed in memory of deceased Clan Donald Lands Trust Life Members including a plaque dedicated to Angus William Ranald Macdonald (1919-2005), 'Painter, of Sydney, Australia; Life Member and Benefactor of the Clan Donald Lands Trust'.

More recently, there appears to have been an appeal by the CDLT for funds to pay for a memorial to Aeneas Euan Ranald MacDonell of Glengarry, 23rd Chief of Glengarry (1941-2021), as evidenced by this JustGiving page, which is still live:
<https://www.justgiving.com/clandonald-landstrust>

We have not been able to ascertain whether this memorial has been instated, and whether monies were contributed through channels other than the JustGiving page. (It should also be noted that the JustGiving page was not only for this purpose.)

An advert in a former CDLT newsletter refers to memorial trees and engraved bronze commemorative plaques, which supporters could purchase for £500 (or £1000 for double width). The advert stated that the bronze plaques would be mounted on the exterior south-facing Museum wall, 'framed by seasoned ornamental grasses and looking onto the Glengarry memorial'.

We have found an image online of one of these bronze plaques in memory of Michele Donald MCSP (1934-2016): 'A Long Time Friend of the Clan Donald Lands Trust and benefactor whose care for others was outstanding'.

https://armadalecastle.com/about/support/dsc_4876-michele-donald-plaque/

There may be others.

To date there has been no communication from the CDLT Trustees about the fate of the Memorial Trees, or about any of the other Memorials, or how families will be able to continue to access them if the sale goes ahead as planned. Clan members frequently visit the memorial trees, plaques and benches. Depriving families and friends access to these memorial sites would be an act of immeasurable cruelty. (See also Section 4.4 below - The Armadale Book of Remembrance)

3.5 Adopt a Tree scheme

This article, as well as explaining the Trees for the Future Project, mentions the 'Adopt A Tree' scheme:

<https://clandonaldusa.org/trees-for-armadale-castle/>

As well as the opportunity to donate to the Trees for the Future Project, the CDLT was also offering the opportunity for supporters to adopt one of these very special trees. It goes on:

'Whether you're looking for a sustainable gift for someone special or an unusual way to commemorate a significant date, it's a great way to show your support. Each adopted tree will have a dedication label and you'll also receive a unique certificate with photographs of your tree and the species details. All monies raised will directly support tree planting and care... To learn more about tree adoption visit the Clan Donald Foundation website at

<https://www.clandonaldfoundation.org/project.php>.'

It is clear that those who paid to adopt a tree would expect the Gardens and Woodland to be cared for and nurtured by the Trust long-term, and that they would continue to have the chance to visit the Gardens to gain enjoyment from watching the trees flourish. The 'Adopt a Tree' scheme was mentioned on Armadale Castle's website as recently as January 2025 (as discovered via the Wayback Machine). However the current 'Support' page makes no reference to it, although the page still features images of trees being planted.



Armadale Castle woodland

4. Historic and Heritage value of the Museum, Art, Library and Archive Collections

As well as the HES-designated Castle, Historic Buildings, Monuments, Gardens and Woodland, the value of the following heritage assets needs to be considered.

4.1 Museum of the Isles: Overview, Purpose, Governance concerns

4.1.1 Overview of the museum

The Museum of the Isles which incorporates a Study Centre and Library is a high-quality attraction which was built within the restored gardens of the Castle. The present building was purpose-built and opened in 2002, replacing an earlier museum. This new museum was funded by a major donation from a benefactor, and was prompted by the bequest of the Cunninghame Collection to the Museum of the Isles.

The Museum takes visitors through 1500 years of the history and culture of the area once known as the Kingdom of the Isles, bringing alive this rich period of Scotland's history. It essentially tells the story of the Highlands and Islands as a whole through the story of Clan Donald with its connections to the Celtic, Norse and Gaelic aspects of Scotland's history, as well as its relationship with the Kingdom of the Scots. The period of the Kingdom of the Isles (Rìgh Innse Gall) and the Lordship of the Isles represented a high point in clan society, associated with a rich Gaelic culture of art and song.

This is an important story to tell for Scotland as whole. This period, and the integral role of Clan Donald in Scotland's history as a whole, is not generally well understood. The only other museum which covers it in depth is the National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh.

The Museum of the Isles is Skye's only accredited museum and has won a number of awards including the Museum of the Year Award and the Museum of the Year Research Facility Award.

The museum was constructed to BS5454 – the standard relevant at the time for the construction of archive buildings - and with advice from the MLA security adviser. It occupies an area of around 576 square metres. As well as 7 galleries, a gift shop, study centre, public toilets, staff offices, toilets and workroom, there is an environmentally controlled storage area divided into three zones, for the storage of artefacts and archives not on display. There is also a Patrons Wall to honour supporters.

In 2021 the Museum received a grant of £36,000 from Museums Galleries Scotland to enable the museum to 'create a new covered outdoor learning space for school groups, families and other community outreach programmes. The plan is to equip the old laundry ruin, adjacent to the museum building, with a semi-permanent roof covering and raised floor.' To do this CDLT installed a slat wood floor, two large tents and a ramp. As of April 2025, there were signs stating that the Laundry building is out of bounds and it appears to be in use as a store shed. There are memorial plaques inside the Laundry – it is not clear what happened to these when the tents were installed.

In 2023 the Museum was awarded a grant of £5,000 from the Pilgrim Trust (administered through the Association of Independent Museums) to acquire an improved wireless Environmental Monitoring system. (https://aim-museums.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/AIM-February-2024_Low-Res.pdf)

Will these monies be returned by CDLT to the funders who invested in the museum?

4.1.2 Purpose and Stated Objectives of the Museum of the Isles

Clause 1.1. of the Museum's Collection Development Policy 2016-2021 states:

'The Museum of the Isles supports the Clan Donald Land Trust's mission to educate, inspire and promote an appreciation of Clan Donald, the Lordship of the Isles and the history of the West Highlands and Islands of Scotland. It aims to promote an understanding and awareness of this history, culture and traditions by educating and inspiring members of Clan Donald, the local community and visitors to Armadale, now and in the future.'

Clause 1.3 of the Museum's Collection Development Policy 2016-2021 states:

'By definition, the museum has a long-term purpose and holds collections in trust for the benefit of the public in relation to its stated objectives. The governing body therefore accepts the principle that sound curatorial reasons must be established before consideration is given to any acquisition to the collection, or the disposal of any items in the museum's collection.'

The first Charitable Purpose of the Clan Donald Lands Trust (the Museum's governing body) under its Deed of Trust is:

'Operating and maintaining the Clan Museum on the Clan Lands in the Island of Skye for the purpose of fostering Clan sentiment and interest and the encouragement of education of members of the Clan and the general public in the history of the Highland Clans and the Clan Donald in particular and the collection and preservation of records and traditions and objects of historic interest bearing on the history of Clan Donald.'

4.1.3 Matters of concern relating to Governance of the Museum of the Isles

According to the Museum's Collection Development Policy 2016-2021, its governing body is the Board of Trustees of the Clan Donald Lands Trust. This policy state that the Trustee body with delegated decision-making powers in relation to the Museum is the Executive Committee of the Clan Donald Lands Trust. **This is a concern**, as we know that the Executive Committee was disbanded and is now in effect one person – i.e. the Chief Executive, who has no qualifications or experience in regard to Museums or Archives and seems intent on selling/ closing it.

This Policy was to be reviewed no later than June 2021. We have not yet been able to determine if there is a more up to date policy as all emails to the CDLT requesting information have been ignored.

Page 4 of the 2016 Policy expanded on the Governance structure for the museum. This included the following definitions:

'Executive Committee: the Committee of Trustees with delegated powers including responsibility for... the approval of disposal of items from the collections, except those exceptional cases where the motive for disposal is principally financial...'

‘Museum Advisory Committee: the committee which has general oversight of the museum operation and direction, and which advises the Executive Committee and Board of Trustees. Working with the Museum Manager and CEO, it recommends acquisitions and disposals, as well as loans to and from the collections, to the Board or its Executive Committee....’

Our concern is that, from what we can gather, the Museum Advisory Committee was meant to be a sub-group of the Board of Trustees, but as there are now only four Trustees, and the committees were abolished, it is essentially only the Chief Executive who has oversight of the Museum. Therefore, there is no process in place to scrutinise any decisions he might be making in regard to the Museum or the fate of its collections.

To evidence this concern we only need to examine the CDLT Annual Report and Accounts 2021 (as submitted to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator):

‘Organisational Structure [of the CDLT]

The Board meets annually to fulfil its statutory obligations. Since inception the Board delegated its management powers to an executive committee (the “Executive Committee”) to ensure the efficient running of the Trust on an on-going basis. During 2021 several Board sub-committees were in force and contributed to the running of CDLT. These include:

- Museum, Heritage and Culture
- Administration Finance and Governance
- Estate Buildings and Gardens
- Retail and Visitor Services
- Clan Community Outreach and Engagement

For the purposes of good governance and operational effectiveness, it is intended that the Executive Committee operational role will be subsumed within the role and responsibilities of a Chief Executive Officer to be appointed in 2021.’

The Collection Development Policy also defines the ‘Museum Manager’ role as follows:

‘Museum Manager: the senior professional officer responsible to the Executive Committee through the CEO for the operation of the Museum according to proper professional standards. The Museum Manager to have a relevant degree or diploma in Museum studies (or equivalent), or experience of the principles and practice of Museum operation and management as may be determined to be acceptable to Museums Galleries Scotland. In the event that the Museum Manager does not fully meet this requirement a Museum Mentor will be appointed until they achieve full compliance with the standard.’

Our concern is that the current Museum Manager does not have a degree or diploma in Museum Studies and lacks breadth and depth of relevant experience. Her experience of ‘the principles and practice of Museum operation and management’ is limited. She began working for the Museum in 2021 as a trainee, and only qualified as an Archivist in November 2023 (having done a distance learning course in Archives). She has been promoted to the role of Museum Manager and Archivist, but has no experience of working in any other museum or archive.

Since the current CEO started, the Museum staff who had museum qualifications and many years of relevant experience have left. It appears to us to be irresponsible to have someone with such limited experience in charge of the Museum at this critical time. There is a danger that important collections

will be disposed without due diligence or adherence to the relevant standards and ethical codes of conduct as the postholder is unlikely to have the 'clout' needed to challenge the Chief Executive, and, as stated above, there is no longer a Museum Advisory or Executive Committee. This is a dereliction of duty by the CDLT Trustees and a breach of their own Collection Development Policy.

Another principal issue of concern is that the Trustees have not given a cast-iron guarantee that they intend to open a new museum. In fact, all indications are that they will not do so as they intend to sell everything in Skye, move to a different area, and start a 'grant giving charity'. (See Appendix 1) Therefore, there is little motivation for them to follow the due process outlined in the Policy in regard to disposals from the Collection, as they will not be constrained by the prospect of loss of Accreditation status.

The Collection Development Policy of 2016 is clear in the collecting aims, and what had been achieved to date (see Section 4.2). The statements issued by the CDLT Trustees in relation to the Museum and its collections are alarming, to say the least, and contradict the Collection Development Policy – for example, the claim that a lot of items don't relate to Clan Donald. (See Appendix 1). In spite of the assurances about ethical disposal contained in the 2016 Policy, we have very little faith that these will be properly adhered to.

In short, we believe that the combination of the current CEO and Museum Manager is not up to the complex task of reviewing the collections, appraising and making decisions as to the fate of these and establishing a sound rationale based on professional knowledge/ consideration of all relevant ethical standards and codes of practice. This could be catastrophic if items end up being sold, broken up or disposed of which should be retained and kept together.

Key points to note from the Collection Development Policy are as follows:

1.2 – "The governing body will ensure that both acquisition and disposal are carried out openly and with transparency. [\[There has been very little transparency about anything\]](#)

1.7 – The disposal will not be undertaken to generate short-term revenue. . .will be undertaken as a last resort after other sources of funding have been thoroughly explored. . .extensive prior consultation with sector bodies.

5.1 – the principles on which priorities for rationalization and disposal are determined will be through a formal review process.

5.2 – The procedures (for disposal) will meet professional standards. **The process will be documented, open and transparent. There will be clear communication with stakeholders.**

8.1 – As the Museum holds archives, including photographs and printed ephemera, the governing body will be guided by the Code of Practice on Archives for Museums and Galleries in the United Kingdom.

16.2 – The governing body will confirm that it is legally free to dispose of an item. Agreements on disposal made with donors will also be taken into account.

16.3 – When disposal of a museum object is being considered, the museum will establish if it was acquired with the aid of an external funding organization. In such cases, any conditions attached to the original grant will be followed. This may include repayment of the original grant and a proportion of the proceeds if the item is disposed of by sale.

16.5 – The decision to dispose of material from the collection will be taken by the governing body only after full consideration of the reasons for disposal. Other factors, including public benefit, the implications for the museum's collections and collections held by museums and other organisations collecting the same material or in related fields will be considered. **Expert advice will be obtained and the views of stakeholders such as donors, researchers, local and source communities and others served by the museum will also be sought.**

16.9 – A period of at least two months will be allowed for an interest in acquiring the material.

16.10 – Any monies received by the museum governing body from the disposal of items will be applied solely and directly for the benefit of the collections. This normally means the purchase of further acquisitions. . . In exceptional cases, improvements relating to the care of collections. . . Any monies received in compensation for the damage, loss or destruction of items will be applied in the same way. Advice on those cases where the monies are intended to be used for the care of collections will be sought from Museums Galleries Scotland.

16.11 – The proceeds of a sale will be allocated so it can be demonstrated that they are spent in a manner compatible with the requirements of the Accreditation standard. Money must be restricted to the long-term sustainability, use and development of the collection.

16.12 – Full records will be kept of all decisions on disposals and the items involved and proper arrangements made for the preservation and/or transfer.”

We intend to raise all our concerns in regard to the governance of the Museum of the Isles with Museums Galleries Scotland - the body responsible for Accreditation standards – as well as OSCR, given that the operation of the Museum is one of CDLT’s principal Charitable Purposes.

4.2 Museum Collections: Overview, Categories, Themes

4.2.1 Overview

Note: As there is no public catalogue available of the whole collection, the information in this Report pertaining to museum, archive and library collections has been sourced from sources which could be found in the public domain:

- Museum of the Isles Collection Development Policy 2016-2021
- Armadale Castle website and social media posts
- Art UK website
- Various Clan Donald Newsletters published from 1980s onwards
- Highland Council Historic Environment Record <https://her.highland.gov.uk/Source/SHG28474>
- National Register of Archives Scotland catalogue
- Scottish Archive Network catalogue
- Tasglann nan Eilean Siar catalogue
- A variety of other websites as noted

It is likely that there are important artefacts in the museum’s collection which are not included in this document, as the Collection Development Policy, on which we have mainly relied, only refers to collections as they stood at 2016 and we have not been able to ascertain if it has been updated.

The Museum owns the greater part of its collections, with no more than 15% being items held on loan (as of 2016). It has relied on the donation of objects and on financial donations, some relating to specific purchases, in order to add to the collections.

The stated collecting aim of the Museum of the Isles, according to its 2016-2021 Collection Development Policy, is:

‘to collect the full range of material evidence and assorted information bearing on the history, culture and traditions of Clan Donald and the Lordship of the Isles in support of our statement of purpose. The main subject themes [as outlined below] will continue to be the Museum’s collecting areas. The period of time to which the collection relates will be from the 12th century to the present. The only

exception to this will be the acquisition of archaeological material relating to Skye, particularly to the Trust's estates there.'

4.2.2 Collection Categories

The Museum collection is made up of a mix of **broad categories** - weapons and militaria, decorative arts, costume and textiles, art works on paper etc. - supported by a library of manuscripts and archives, antiquarian books, and secondary reference material.

It can be divided into the following **subject categories**:

- Art works on paper (prints, paintings, pencil drawings etc) [360+]
 - Maps and plans [438]
 - Archive and manuscript material [64] plus the Macdonald estate papers [6000+ catalogue entries]
 - Antiquarian books and pamphlets [1100 +]
 - Reference books [8000 +]
 - Photographic collections (photographs, slides and transparencies) [9000+]
 - Weapons and militaria [76]
 - Textiles and costume [37]
 - Musical instruments [7]
 - Decorative arts [36]
 - Medals and coins [82]
 - Social history including domestic bygones [185]
 - Agricultural and fishing equipment [19]
 - Miscellaneous [17]
 - Archaeological assemblages [2]
- (Totals as at 2016 by accession numbers)

4.2.3 Collection themes

The **themes** of the Museum's collecting areas are as follows:

- **Materials relating to the several clans etc within Clan Donald, their history, culture and antecedents**

There are six main branches to the clan – Antrim and Clan Donald South, Clanranald, Glencoe, Glengarry, Keppoch and Sleat - as well as several lesser-known branches in Scotland and Ireland. The Glengarry and Sleat branches are particularly well represented in the collections through the Cuninghame collection for Glengarry and items derived from Lord Macdonald as well as the Macdonald estate archives for Sleat [See section 4.10 below]. Material relating to these families and associated families includes quite a large group of general clan material such as badges, grants of arms, etc. The collection of the now defunct Clan Donald Society of Aberdeen was acquired.

- **Material relating to the cultural heritage and history of the Lordship of the Isles and the geographic area covered by its territories on the western seaboard**

The Policy noted that it was unlikely that much original material dating from the actual period of the Lordship of the Isles (i.e. before 1493) would ever be acquired by the Museum of the Isles but stated that 'if the opportunity ever arose to obtain original material from this period, the Museum would pursue its acquisition.' Most items from the Museum's costume, decorative arts, weapons and music collections, as well as virtually all the reference works in the library collections, relate to the history and cultural heritage of the Highlands and Islands and therefore to that of the Lordship itself. The Museum has continued to collect actively in this area.

- **Material relating to the geographic areas in the western highlands and islands from which Clan Donald originated**

A large proportion under this head was made up of secondary reference works in the library, with a small amount of primary manuscript material (eg the Glenaladale/Borrodale letter books, ref: MS.1) and early maps and charts.

The exception is the territory of the Macdonalds of Sleat i.e. parts of Skye (Trotternish, Strath and Sleat) and North Uist. The Museum holds a wealth of manuscript and photographic material on this area including our main archive collection, the Macdonald Estate Papers. [See Section 4.10 below]

It also holds a number of artefacts originating from Skye including the Col. Jock Macdonald collection of crofting bygones, which was collected in Skye in the 1930s.

- **Material bearing on the lives and careers of individual clansmen throughout the world**

The collections include material on some of the better known members of Clan Donald of the past such as Flora Macdonald, Marshal Macdonald, Sir Hector Macdonald, George Macdonald, and Sir John A. Macdonald, as well as a number of successful 20th century MacDonalds. This is in a variety of media such as biographies, portraits, photographs, newspaper cuttings, uniforms, medals etc.

Items relating to individual clansmen acquired since 2008 include the medals won by Donald Archie MacDonald at the Paris and Antwerp Olympics as well as a memorial ring to Flora MacDonald.

The Policy notes that 'Biographies and other books as well as newspaper cuttings, photographs etc., relating to individual MacDonalds continue to be collected.' It stated that this area could be considerably expanded with relatively little cost, for instance by the development of a photographic archive of individual MacDonalds. 'This would be backed up by the acquisition of three-dimensional objects where possible. Areas for collecting include MacDonalds successful in politics, the arts, literature, science, industry, the services etc.'

- **Material relating to the Trust's Skye estates**

The Museum collections include material relating to the history of the CDLT's estate on the Sleat peninsula. Objects in this part of the collections range from Neolithic scrapers found at Camus Daraich to a Founder's medal of the MacDonald of Sleat Masonic lodge, founded in 1931 in the Stables, Armadale. It has a collection of over 9000 photographs, slides and transparencies. Most of these show the work of the CDLT and the Clan Donald Centre since its inception. This archive is continually added to with day-to-day operations as well as special events and the progress of long-term projects being recorded. The Museum also has a growing collection of old photographs and postcards (late 19th/early 20th century) many of which relate to the estate. The Museum collection includes relevant genealogical material for south Skye.



Decorated food vessel dating from c2100-1900 BC, found in a Bronze Age burial site at Armadale



MacDonald Estate Rent Ledger 1892-1918



Interior view of Museum

4.3 Museum Displays

The Museum displays include original artefacts, archives and works of art from its own collections and others which are on loan from other institutions or individuals.

Lord of the Isles/ Pre history

The gallery starts with Somerled, who established the Lordship of the Isles and founded a dynasty. At its medieval height, under the leadership of Clan Donald, the Lordship extended from the Western Isles all the way to Ireland. In this gallery are also displayed objects that pre-date the Lordship, including Bronze Age and Viking artefacts, and a medieval ship's timber, found in Skye. There is a replica tombstone from Finlaggan.

Jacobites and Clan Chiefs

Objects displayed in this gallery include:

- a Highland targe (shield)
- fine basket-hilted swords
- a rare firearm, the Gunna Breac (1690), which is inscribed with the famous battles where it was reputedly carried (described in 2016 Policy as a 'recent key acquisition')
- objects associated with Bonnie Prince Charlie including Jacobite engraved portrait glasses dedicated to the Prince
- Horn snuff mull which once belonged to Flora MacDonald
- Portrait of Flora MacDonald
- Plaque of Bonnie Prince Charlie made in Paris in 1747
- Powder horn and dirk belonging to Col. Alasdair Ranaldson Macdonell of Glengarry (1771-1828)*
- Bagpipes made for Lord MacDonald around 1880
- Fine china, jewels, bagpipes and ceremonial weapons
- Portraits by Angelica Kauffmann (1741-1807) and Sir Henry Raeburn (1756-1823) – further detailed below under 'Art Collection'

* It is believed that these items are part of an assemblage which were shown on the BBC's 'Antiques Roadshow' programme (Series 44 - broadcast from the Botanic Gardens, Edinburgh) which first aired in April 2022, but which were gifted to the Museum of the Isles around 2019. In this episode, a woman brought along a stunning set of traditional Highland dress that once belonged to clan chief MacDonell of Glengarry. Her gt grandfather Peter MacDonald had purchased these items around the 1920s, when the MacDonells were short of money, to ensure they stayed in the MacDonald family. The items shown consisted of a sporran and belt, a powder horn and belt, a dirk, a sgian dubh and a magnificent plaid brooch. The woman stated that she was considering giving the items to the Clan Donald Museum in Skye. On Armadale Castle's website there are photographs of the powder horn and dirk. Another page of the website states: 'Shown here being carefully handled is a powder horn engraved with the crest badge of MacDonell of Glengarry, which was donated to the museum last year.' This can be viewed here for those with access to BBC iplayer [at 6:52]

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/m00164d7/antiques-roadshow-series-44-royal-botanic-garden-edinburgh-3>

Crofting

Displays of objects associated with the everyday life of those who lived off the land, many of which were collected from Skye crofts, such as traditional tools and implements used in farming, fishing, spinning and weaving, including an original hand-loom.

Emigration

This gallery tells the stories of those who left the Highlands and Islands to start a new life abroad, whether by choice or forced eviction. They settled all across the world: in Australia, Canada, the USA and New Zealand. Their descendants are part of the modern Clan Donald family.

In 2019, the Museum acquired a letter written by Alastair Ranaldson MacDonell, the 15th Chief of Glengarry, to the Highland Society of London in 1827 which had been offered for sale by the Argosy Old & Rare Book Store in New York. The funds to purchase this letter and the accompanying note of Glengarry's demise were donated by the Glencoe Foundation.

In the same year, several objects from the collection of the Museum of the Isles which belonged to Glengarry were loaned for display in the exhibition, 'Wild and Majestic: Romantic Visions of Scotland', at the National Museums of Scotland in Edinburgh (June-November 2019).

'A' Bhirlinn The Newsletter of the Clan Donald Society of the Highlands and Islands' (Issue 19, Spring 2019) announced that a special acquisition fund had recently been established to ensure they could act quickly should important Clan Donald material become available to purchase as the museum was keen to expand its varied collection of objects and archives relating to the long and rich history of Clan Donald. (See section 4.11)

4.4. Memorials – The Armadale Book of Remembrance

The Armadale Book of Remembrance is permanently displayed at the Museum of the Isles, and is hand made using traditional skills and materials. This is another way (in addition to the memorials mentioned above in Sections 3.3 and 3.4) in which families could commemorate loved ones with a special connection to Armadale, while also financially supporting the CDLT. Entries could be inscribed under the date of death or any other anniversary.

The ability to enter a memorial dedication in the Book of Remembrance and the knowledge that the book remains on the Armadale estate and on display in the Museum of the Isles, for family members

to inspect, provide an important connection to family for the Sleat community and Clan Donald members worldwide.

4.5 Archaeological assemblages and objects

Museum of the Isles has been allocated the following archaeological assemblages or items through Treasure Trove/ SAFAP (Scottish Archaeology Finds Allocation Panel), either directly or indirectly:

- Bronze Age Dig assemblage from Pier Road, Armadale (initially allocated to Inverness Museum and subsequently transferred to Museum of the Isles)
- Iron Anchor (Norse to Medieval period)
- Barbed and Tanged Arrowhead and Pottery Sherd (Early Bronze Age)
- Excavation assemblage from Bronze Age Settlement, Home Farm, Portree
- Coin (Edward I Penny) found at Kinloch, Loch na Dal
- 11th century coin (denier of Heinrich II, Holy Roman Emperor from 1002-24) found at Kilbeg
- Excavation assemblage (flaked lithics) from Mesolithic site at Camas Daraich
- Medieval? shell encrusted pot found in Loch Sligachan
- Sword pommel: Early Medieval copper alloy five lobed sword pommel found at Teangue
- Wedge shaped piece of wood from original timber in Caisteal Maol, Kyeakin

4.6 Other items in museum collection (discovered via various online sources)

- Two cannon balls from Armadale Castle
- Hoard of 50 coins, found in a turf wall on the farm of Scuddaburgh 22 October 1852
- Two boat timbers from Rubh' an Dunain one of which from a clinker-built four-oared rowing boat c6m long dating to c.1100, and the other, undated, from a larger sailing vessel in same tradition, perhaps more than 10m long [one of which mentioned above as being on display in the first gallery]
- Highland pistols made by Doune
- Marshal Macdonald's Baton
- Jacobite papers and pamphlets
- The Kinlochmoidart Ring, an 18th century Jacobite era piece purchased in the 1990s with the help of the National Fund for Acquisitions
- Jacobite glasses donated c.2007
- 18ft skiff (boat) built c.1897 for MacDonalds of Redcliff in Portree donated c.2007
- A set of applewood bagpipes made in Nova Scotia in the 1840s
- The Great Book of Skye
- The Ellice MacDonald collection (gifted in 2014)

4.7 Somerled Stained glass windows from Armadale Castle

There is a **stained glass armorial window dedicated to Somerled**, on display in the museum, which was originally displayed in Armadale Castle entrance hall. The figure represents Somerled MacGilleBride (d. 1164). A portion of the window reads 'SOMERLED REX INSULARUM'. The stained glass window itself dates to no later than 1815 (the year it was installed). The stained glass window was the work of W. R. Eginton.

The rest of the original Somerled window - a stirring full length portrait of Somerled – is displayed in the 'Clan Hall' in the Stables restaurant at Armadale.

The remains of the staircase, where the Somerled window used to be situated, forms a rostrum in the sculptured ruin in the Gardens.

4.8 Other museum objects on display in the Stables

There are objects on display in the Stables restaurant such as a bronze memorial plaque to Sir John McDonald (1874-1964) 'President of the First Clan MacDonald Society 1925-1931 founded 1889', and items of armoury, which are presumably part of the Museum's collections.

4.9 Art Collection Highlights

The Art UK website lists thirteen works of art belonging to the Museum of the Isles, including sculptures and memorials, several of which are by nationally or internationally important artists. Some of these are on display in the Museum, some are in the Gardens and some are presumably in storage. It should be noted that these are just the 'highlights' of the art collection. As stated in the overview in Section 4.2.2 above, the Museum appears to hold 36 items of Decorative Art (and may have acquired more since 2016):

1) Portrait of Alasdair Ranaldson MacDonell (1771–1828), 15th Chief of Glengarry by Angelica Kauffmann (1741-1807). Painted c.1790. Bequeathed to the museum by Miss Marsaili Cuninghame, 1999

https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/alasdair-ranaldson-macdonell-17711828-15th-chief-of-glengarry-166891/search/venue:museum-of-the-isles-6636/view_as/grid/page/1

2) Portrait of Sir James MacDonell (1778–1857), KCB by Henry Raeburn (1756-1823)
Possibly painted in 1809. **Bequeathed to the museum by Miss Marsaili Cuninghame in 1999.**

This portrait shows General Sir James MacDonell (1778–1857), younger brother of the 15th Chief of Glengarry. At one time he was known as 'The Bravest Man in the British Army' for the part he played in the defence of Hougoumont in 1815, a strategic location close to the site of the Battle of Waterloo. Throughout his career he was the recipient of many military honours including the Knight Commander and Knight of the Grand Cross of the Order of the Bath, as well as the decorations of Maria Theresa of Austria and St Vladimir of Russia. Sir James chose to have his portrait painted by Sir Henry Raeburn, as did his two brothers. The portrait of his elder brother, Alasdair Ranaldson MacDonell is in the collections of the National Gallery of Scotland, while that of his younger brother, Admiral Somerled MacDonell is held in a private collection.

https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/sir-james-macdonell-17781857-kcb-166895/search/venue:museum-of-the-isles-6636/view_as/grid/page/1

3) Portrait of Alasdair Ruadh MacDonell (c.1725–1761), 13th Chief of Glengarry attributed to Cosmo Alexander (1724-1772)

The painting has always been in the family of the MacDonells of Glengarry. The gillie is carrying heather, the badge of Clan Donald. **Bequeathed to the museum by Miss Marsaili Cuninghame in 1999.**

https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/alasdair-ruadh-macdonell-c-17251761-13th-chief-of-glengarry-166897/search/venue:museum-of-the-isles-6636/view_as/grid/page/1

This portrait is one of the few known to show the change and development in Scottish Highland dress. Its subject, Alasdair Ruadh MacDonell, 13th chief of Glengarry, is wearing a belted plaid, and his gillie or servant is wearing a version of what we know today as the modern kilt. A known Jacobite supporter and officer in the French army, Alasdair Ruadh was captured by British Government forces on his return from France in November 1745. He spent the next 22 months imprisoned in the Tower of London. It has been suggested by the nineteenth-century author Andrew Lang that, upon his release, Alasdair Ruadh became the infamous Hanoverian secret agent 'Pickle the Spy'.

4) Portrait of Lord Mungo Murray (1668 –1700), Son of 1st Marquess of Atholl by John Michael Wright (1617–1694) (copy after). Bequeathed to the museum by Miss Marsaili Cuninghame, 1999.

https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/lord-mungo-murray-1668-1700-son-of-1st-marquess-of-atholl-166898/search/venue:museum-of-the-isles-6636/view_as/grid/page/1

5) Portrait of Sorley Maclean (1911-1996) by Alexander Moffat (b.1943)

https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/sorley-maclean-19111996-166893/search/venue:museum-of-the-isles-6636/page/1/view_as/grid

Prominent in the revival of Gaelic literature and a staunch campaigner for the teaching of the Gaelic language in Scottish schools, MacLean's passion for literature, Highland culture and politics, as well as his emotional connection to the islands of Skye and Raasay are represented in the portrait by the books, beret (expressing anti-fascist sympathies) and the impressive backdrop of the Cuillins.

6) Red Sky over the Sound of Sleat, VIII (o/c 200) by Jon Schueler (1916-1992)

Scottish Arts Council Collection Bequest, 1997; Inscription description: 1. 'Red sky over the sound of Sleat VIII Nov 71-Jan 72' 2. Scottish Arts Council label, no 73/7

<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/red-sky-over-the-sound-of-sleat-viii-oc-200-166896>

7) In the House of the White Gull by Tom MacDonald (1914-1985)

A Scottish Arts Council Collection Bequest, 1997

https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/in-the-house-of-the-white-gull-166892/search/venue:museum-of-the-isles-6636/view_as/grid/page/1

8) Bluebells and Wild Garlic, Armadale by Sherry A. Palmer (b.1947)

Purchased from An Tuirean Arts Centre, Portree, 1996

Painting by American artist Sherry Palmer depicting the stunning carpet of bluebells and wild garlic that can be found within the gardens at Armadale Castle in late spring.

9) Raven's Rock Memorial to Air Commodore Donald Macdonell of Glengarry (1913–1999), CB, DFC by Gerald Laing (1926-2011)

A monument, gifted from the Clan with the following inscription on side of plinth:

'In memory of the much loved and admired Air Commodore Donald MacDonell CB DFC 22nd Chief of Glengarry 1913–1999'

Inscription on back of plinth: 'The Raven's Rock / Erected by / Family, Friends / and Clansfolk / World Wide'

https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/ravens-rock-memorial-to-air-commodore-donald-macdonell-of-glengarry-19131999-cb-dfc-250871/search/venue:museum-of-the-isles-6636/view_as/grid/page/1

10) Skye Terrier by William Brodie (1815-1881)

Sculpture. This is thought to be a maquette for the famous statue of Greyfriars Bobby in Edinburgh. It is on loan to the museum from the Skye Terrier Club.

https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/skye-terrier-250883/search/venue:museum-of-the-isles-6636/view_as/grid/page/1

11) Two Rising Lines II – a marble sculpture by renowned Scottish contemporary land artist Julie Brook The sculpture is located in the Gardens and uses Torrinn marble to respond to its woodland site. It was gifted to the museum by the artist in 2010.

<https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/two-rising-lines-ii-250878>

12) Teko, the Swimming Otter by Laurence Broderick (1935-2024)
Sculpture, located in the Gardens of Armadale Castle

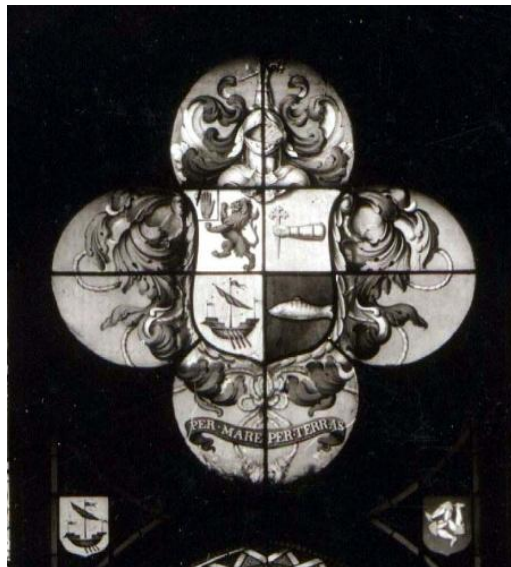
https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/teko-the-swimming-otter-250867/search/venue:museum-of-the-isles-6636/view_as/grid/page/1

13) The Homecoming by Georgie Welch (b.1969)

Sculpture on display in the Gardens depicting a pair of life-sized bronze Skye Terriers, one drop-eared and one prick-eared. Commissioned by The Skye Terrier Club 2014.

Inscription on the bottom edge of the sculpture: OWNED AND LOVED BY THE SKYE TERRIER CLUB; adjacent to the sculpture: 'The Homecoming unveiled by HRH The Princess Royal, 24th July 2014. Sculpted by Georgie Welch. Commissioned by The Skye Terrier Club.'

https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/the-homecoming-250874/search/venue:museum-of-the-isles-6636/page/1/view_as/grid



Some of the treasures from the Museum and Archive collection (l-r): Breviary of Bishop Hew Macdonald (1699-1773); Stained glass window depicting Somerled Arms by W.R. Eginton, rescued from Armadale Castle; Portrait of Alasdair Ruadh MacDonell, 13th Chief of Glengarry

4.10 Archive and Library

<https://armadalecastle.com/explore/library-archives/>

The Archive and Library are housed in the Museum building. As the archive and library collections are included in the Museum Collection Development Policy 2016-2021, the contents of which have been

detailed above, this part of our Report deals briefly with only a few of the highlights of the archive collections.

The Archive collections house the Macdonald Estate Papers and Correspondence (1473-1992), a unique collection of original rentals and estate documents relating to Skye and North Uist which provide a framework for local history and genealogy research. The catalogue of this collection is available online through the [National Register of Archives for Scotland](#). The catalogue reference number is NRAS3273.

The archives include 19th century plans showing the layout of Armadale Gardens and policies.

There are further smaller collections ranging from individual letters to collections of family papers. These are catalogued under code GB1892 on the [Scottish Archive Network](#) online catalogue.

There is also an extensive reference library of Highland and Scottish publications including collections of antiquarian books which have been gifted over the years.

The Archive and Library also offers a **genealogy service**. It holds census reports, parish records, monumental inscriptions, maps and a database of detailed records of several thousand Skye families.

An article by former archivist and librarian Margaret MacDonald from 1991 details the provenance of collection as it stood at that time:

‘Last year saw the opening of a new library and study centre at the Clan Donald Centre at Armadale. It was the final realisation of one of the Centre’s original aims – to collect documents, books, traditions, etc. relating to the history of Clan Donald and the Lordship of the Isles.

Almost since its inception in 1971, clansmen from all over the world have donated books, while in recent years this has been augmented by a generous grant by the Glencoe Foundation for the purchase of books. By 1988 the Centre had accumulated a library of over 1,500 books and journals. In that year two important events occurred.

First. Harry Matthews, an American member of Clan Donald, donated his collection of over 2,500 books, journals, and manuscripts to the Trust. A few months later the Trust was offered the chance to purchase an important collection of Jacobite books assembled to mark the 200th anniversary of Prince Charles Edward Stuart’s death. It was able to do so with the help of grants from several institutions, including the ever generous Glencoe Foundation.’

The article goes on to describe the opportunity for a research study centre to be established at Armadale House:

‘The house had originally been built for the head gardener at Armadale and is sited beside the walled garden just up the hill from the Castle. It needed extensive work to convert it to its new specialised use as a library.

Our collections are varied. We have books on Scottish history, literature (including Gaelic), folklore, archaeology, music, and costume, with particular emphasis on the Highlands, as well

as biographies and clan histories. We also have a growing genealogical section comprising a mixture of published works and family trees sent in by clansmen.

By the time this article is published we also hope to have transferred the Macdonald estate papers from the Scottish Record Office. These papers, **purchased by the Clan Donald Lands Trust in 1981**, cover the Skye and North Uist estates of Macdonald of Sleat and are an important historical source. The Scottish Record Office, itself suffering from a lack of accommodation, is willing for the papers to be returned to Skye as part of its general policy of returning archives to the regions, but **until now the Centre has had nowhere to keep them.**'

<https://highcouncilofclandonald.com/magazine/the-clan-donald-centre-library-by-margaret-macdonald-archivist/>

4.11 The John Milner Memorial Acquisition Fund

The Clan Donald New Zealand newsletter of December 2018 reported that the Clan Donald Lands Trust (CDLT) has created a special account known as the John Milner Memorial Acquisition Fund, the purpose of which was to position the Director of the Museum of the Isles to be able to immediately respond to opportunities to acquire Clan Donald related pieces for the Museum. The newsletter stated that this was an off-budget account whose funds were to be restricted to Museum acquisition purposes. The report goes on:

'The late John Milner, as the Principal Advisor to Ellice and Rosa McDonald, and as a Trustee of the Glencoe Foundation, was closely involved with CDLT for decades and through the creation of this new Acquisition Fund, the Board of Trustees of CDLT wish to honour John's commitment to the Trust. An initial contribution of £10,000 has been made to the Fund in John's memory. CDLT would like to invite CD New Zealand Societies and members to consider contributing to this Fund to make our world-class Museum an even more interesting and informative place. Funds donated will only be used for Museum acquisitions.'

If the current CDLT Trustees intend to close and disband the Museum, it would only be correct for any donations which may have been made to this Fund to be returned to the original donors. We have not been able to obtain copies of the CDLT Annual Report and Accounts for 2019 and 2020. The 2021 Annual Report shows that this Fund had £1,000 remaining. This would suggest that at least £9,000 was spent on museum acquisitions between 2019 and 2021?

5. Educational and social value of CDLT heritage assets

As well as the inherent cultural and historical value of the heritage assets outlined in this report, the Museum has an important educational role. The collections offer immense educational value at all levels, which is at risk of being lost. To quote from the CDLT's own 50th anniversary round-up (which has since been removed from its website):

'One of the major strengths of the 2010s was the growth of our family learning programme. Building on earlier activity such as trails and schools talks, the museum team introduced dedicated activity workshops, handling collections and family events. Encouraging the new generation to enjoy, learn about and be part of our special place is core to our mission, and these activities have proved extremely popular with local families and visitors alike.'

As well as educational and school visit programmes there is the potential for student internships and apprenticeships. The collections are clearly also valuable for academic research.

There is also the potential to partner with Sabhal Mòr Ostaig, the National Centre for Gaelic Language and Culture which is part of the University of the Highlands and Islands, and is also based in Sleat, close to the Museum of the Isles.

There is the potential to partner with other museums such as Glencoe and Culloden Battlefield site to create a 'Jacobite trail' or a 'Clan Donald' trail.

The Gardens (designated as of Outstanding historical value by HES) and outdoor space are currently used for education, wellbeing and cultural events. As well as the nature trails and children's play area, the Gardens have in the past been used for archery competitions, craft fairs and so on. All of this is under threat of being lost to the local community and visitors. As stated in Section 3 above, the Gardens could rival those at Inverewe, if properly cared for, developed and marketed.

6. Sustainability considerations

These are the visitor numbers for Armadale which we have been able to obtain to date:

2013: 41527
2014: 45122
2015: 44977
2017: 40,852
2018: 43,533 (open for 9 months instead of 6 months)
2019: 46,000 [from Clan Donald NZ newsletter]
2022: 14,255 (19th June-31st October - post lockdown)
2023: 32,868 (1st April-31st October)
2024: 31,797 (29th March-3rd November)

We believe these figures are for the Castle, Gardens and Museum as a whole.

The Trustees' Annual Report for year ending 31/12/2018 stated:

'Armadale Castle and Gardens and the Museum of the Isles remained popular attractions on the Isle of Skye...

Extended season

CDLT has always operated on a limited seasonal basis - Easter to end of October for which the financial implications (six months income and twelve months expenses) have always been negative. In 2018 Management Committee decided that Armadale should remain open in November on a limited basis (with limited additional expenses). In 2019 Armadale opened in March and will close in November, again on a limited basis, thereby creating a nine month season. Furthermore, the Stables Café remained open for the year and will do so in 2019 in support of the season extension programme. The first results of this initiative have been positive on a net basis as seen by the Board as the first steps towards extending the visitor season to the maximum financially viable.'

In a press release relating to the launch of the 2020 season the then Museum Manager stated:

'We had another great season last year with increased numbers of visitors and much positive feedback. We're greatly looking forward to opening on 2 March and welcoming both local friends and visitors from around the globe.'

Unfortunately these plans were thwarted by the Covid pandemic and lockdown.

The CDLT Trustees' statements about Armadale never having been viable are therefore highly questionable.

- There is a diaspora of hundreds of thousands of Clan Donald descendants all over the world who would be attracted to visit if the marketing were improved.
- There is interest from other visitors to the Isle of Skye, aside from those with connections to Clan Donald.
- The Museum, Gardens, Children's Play Area and the Restaurant taken as a whole make for a great visitor attraction which would be more successful if competently marketed.
- Skye itself has never been so busy with tourists and there is a market which, as far as we are aware, has not really been tapped, in the Mallaig, Morar and Arisaig area, which is also extremely busy with tourists.
- Information from locals in Sleat about how busy Skye is, and how much accommodation costs, makes us highly dubious about the Trustees' statements.

Despite the claims that Armadale is not financially viable there is plenty of potential to generate commercial revenue from the heritage assets, while respecting and caring for them in situ:

- Museum Shop
- Gatehouse Shop
- Gardens and Museum admission fees
- Stables Restaurant
- Self-catering holiday accommodation (there are 6 log cabins, a Forester's Lodge and a Flora MacDonald Suite)
- Potential to work with local suppliers in Sleat to supply the restaurant or have food and drink fairs – partner with local distillery etc.
- Wedding and Events venue (Flora MacDonald married at Armadale)
- Build on existing connections with the worldwide diaspora and network of Clan Donald Associations, and affiliated bodies – advertising and ancestral tourism potential

The Clan Donald Lands Trust Report Of The Trustees for Year Ended 31/12/2023 is available via their website and details the financial data as it stood at that point.

This includes the following:

Museum: Gross Income for the Museum (50% of gate receipts) increased to £220,837 (2022: £80,336)

Estate and Gardens: Gross Income for the Estate and Gardens (50% of gate receipts) increased to £199,546 (2022: £105,160)

Trading Activities: Turnover from Trading activities increased to £546,967 (2022: 253,839)

Aside from the heritage value, the closure of the Museum at Armadale will have a severely detrimental effect on the Sleat economy. A 2019 interview with the then museum manager stated that there were 17 members of staff, though some were seasonal and part-time. The museum had

approximately 44,000 visitors in 2018, and was open every day for nine months of the year. The visitors ranged from coach tours visiting Skye, Armadale Castle and the museum as part of a tour of the site, to independent travellers and those interested in clan history.

<https://www.bishopsgate.org.uk/collections/museum-of-the-isles>

The CDLT's review of its first 50 years stated:

'During the 2010s CDLT continued to thrive and adapt to changes, including a surge in visitor numbers to Skye. The attraction was now a firm favourite with coach parties, welcoming tens of thousands of tour guests each season. To meet this growing demand the Stables shop was converted to a café-bar, and the Gatehouse became the central location for welcoming visitors from all around the world to the site.'

7. Conclusion

As stated at the start of this report, we contend that the sale and break-up of these assets, and their removal from Armadale on the Sleat peninsula, is an act of supreme cultural vandalism which should be resisted and challenged by all who care about Scotland's heritage.

A great deal of the heritage value lies in the inter-connectedness with the site itself. The dispersal of the collections away from the place with which they are associated will have a severely detrimental impact on their heritage value as a holistic whole. It is likely that, as a result of the Trustees' announcement, people who have donated or loaned artefacts or archives to the museum will be in the process of demanding their return. This in itself will damage the reputation of the Museum and the collections' value.

The Lands, Castle, Gardens, museum, archive, library and art collections were gifted to, or purchased for, CDLT in good faith over the last 54 years and should not be considered sellable or disposable by one particular group of Trustees who happen to be in control at this time.

This precious heritage is currently in the process of being sold off and broken up.

We do not feel that the CDLT Trustees are in a position to properly manage the ongoing curation of these important assets.

We urge you to take urgent action to help us to resist and challenge this in any capacity you are able to bring to the campaign.

Appendix 1: Extracts from Statements by CDLT:

In a 'Letter to Clan Donald Members' dated 28th March 2025 it was stated:

'Although the future direction of the charity will depend on feedback from the wider Clan, we hope to be able to develop a new, more efficient, and more viable Clan Centre including museum, exhibition and a modern immersive digital experience.

Later this year, a review is planned of our current Museum of the Isles during which we will look at the current collection and explore future options to present to the Clan. Assuming there is support from the Clan, we expect many of our key items will feature in a new museum/exhibition. The archive and library are likely to play a significant role as well.' [red underlining is ours]

The information issued in a 'Board Update of 24th April 2025' – within less than a month of this letter - contradicts the March letter. The hint that there could be a new museum has been watered down and one has to ask why they would be returning objects to lenders and reviewing collections if they planned to create a new museum?

'Why now? The specific occurrence which demanded an urgent decision from the Trustees was the unexpected ending of the longstanding grant funding which had underwritten Armadale's losses for decades. Sadly, in reality Armadale does not have sufficient visitor footfall to be commercially viable. In the opinion of the Trustees without substantial investment this will not change. However the CDLT was not established to invest in speculative Highland destination tourist ventures....

There has been some speculation about the museum. The museum collections are not for sale and this season they continue to be on display and well looked after. We are now looking at a number of different potential opportunities for the continuation of the CDLT collection being displayed to the clan and the general public. Later this year we will be reviewing our collections and opening discussions with lenders and other relevant bodies.

Over the years the museum has acquired a broad range of items, from papers to photos to artefacts. Many of these do not have a direct Clan Donald link and, due to space constraints, have never been on display. Depending on the collections review, items not staying with the Trust will either be returned to lenders or will be rehomed in other museums. This will be a big job and will necessarily take a considerable time. The Trustees were delighted to hear that some of our former staff have offered to help.

A big part of our current museum is about telling the story of Clan Donald, although sadly to a limited annual visitor audience. Going forward we hope to have the resources to expand on the storytelling and reach a far larger international clan audience, including new generations, through a world class immersive, interactive digital platform. The archive and library will be retained [where would they house it?]; we see that as a big part of our future heritage and genealogical work. This sale is not an end to our work but a new and exciting beginning.' [red underlining is ours]

The full statements are available here:

<https://armadalecastle.com/statement/>

OUR COMMENT ON THESE STATEMENTS:

In regard to the 'unexpected ending' of grant funding, our research has shown that the Glencoe Foundation was established with the specific goal of raising funds for the Clan Donald Lands Trust. One of the current principal Trustees of this Foundation is also a CDLT Trustee, and we therefore

conclude that this is a serious conflict of interest and a misrepresentation of the historical background to the funding situation of the CDLT;

We dispute the description of the historical clan lands, Armadale Castle and Gardens, the Museum of the Isles, the museum and archive collections, and all of the educational and cultural activity associated therewith as a 'speculative Highland destination tourist venture' – this comment exposes the mentality of the current Trustees and CEO;

In short, we disagree with the accuracy and wisdom of the CDLT Trustees' Statements, and refer you to the Report above.

Appendix 2: Photos of memorial trees and memorials identified to date









Memorial plaque



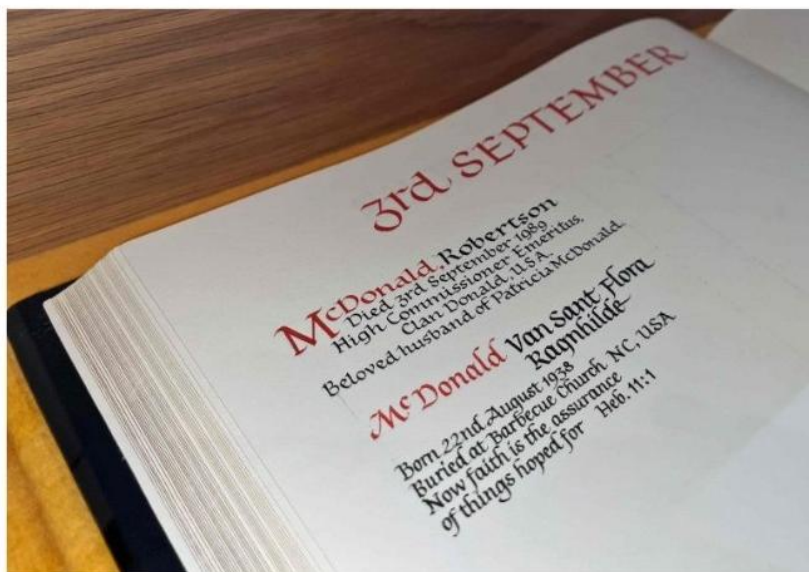
Interior of Laundry showing a memorial plaque



Raven's Rock Memorial to Air Commodore Donald Macdonell of Glengarry (1913–1999), CB, DFC; World War 2 Hero



Memorial bench in the Gardens



Memorial book

Memorial book which is on permanent display at Museum of the Isles, as advertised on Armadale Castle website

REMEMBERING LOVED ONES AT CLAN DONALD SKYE

TREE OF REMEMBRANCE

We frequently have requests from Clansfolk and friends to provide commemorative opportunities here in the last remaining lands in clan ownership. There are two ways of doing this – memorial plaques or the planting of a memorial tree. Each option costs £500 and there are no recurring costs thereafter.

Plaques are created by a foundry that has been operating since 1874, one of whose first commissions was a series of plant labels for Queen Victoria's Sandringham Estate in Norfolk. The plaques are in engraved bronze measuring 12" x 4" and can accommodate up to 200 letters. Double size plaques i.e. 8" deep can be made for £1000. All plaques will be mounted on the south facing outside wall of the Museum of the Isles, framed by seasonal ornamental grasses and looking on to the Glengarry memorial.

A sample layout of a single plate 12 inches x 4 inches. Containing 200 letters approximately. Set with a letter height of 9mm, a single plaque would be 12 inches x 4 inches and contain approximately 200 letters. Lettering style used is Della Robbia Roman, a traditional font.

A sample layout of a double plate 12 inches x 8 inches. Containing 400 letters approximately. Set with a letter height of 9mm, a double plaque would be 12 inches x 8 inches and contain approximately 400 letters. Lettering style used is Della Robbia Roman, a traditional font.

Trees will be planted in Armadale Castle gardens and their position recorded via GPS. Small engraved labels can be created and are included in the overall price.

Trees available are all native species as listed below:

Beech	<i>Fagus sylvatica</i>
Birch	<i>Betula pendula</i>
Rowan	<i>Sorbus aucuparia</i>
Hawthorn	<i>Crataegus monogyna</i>
Oak	<i>Quercus robur/petraea</i>
Scots Pine	<i>Pinus sylvestris</i>

All enquiries to:
Frances Grant
Ph: + 44 (0) 1471 844305
E-mail: fran@clandonald.com

FUNDRAISING FOR THE GUNNA BREAC

The MyDonate fundraising site for Clan Donald Skye to raise funding for the Gunna Breac is now open to donations! To access the site go to:

<https://mydonate.bt.com/charities/clandonaldskye>

This will take you to our site. To see photos of the Gunna Breac please click on the Flickr logo at the bottom of the page. For updates and further information, please click the Facebook logo or our website. We will be updating information on a regular basis to keep you informed concerning the appeal.

All enquiries to:
Frances Grant
Ph: + 44 (0) 1471 844305
E-mail: fran@clandonald.com

WALL OF REMEMBRANCE



The wall looks a bit bleak in the winter but plaques will be framed either side by ornamental grasses that come up in the springtime



Appendix 3: some views of Armadale Gardens

