

## Heritage Report for National Committee by Cheryl Stewart – October 2020

This had been an enforced quiet year for Scotland.

All refurbishers came to the same conclusion that it would be irresponsible to open our venues which would put not only visitors but also our volunteers at risk.

A shame as it would have been Dun 25 Post - Edzel's first year of opening. Jim Sherit vowed he would not open until he had all the kit. Last year he got the last elusive piece - the GZI and it should have been full steam ahead but Covid thought different.

Dundee HQ had to cancel visits and work parties.

Frank Alexander at Ayr 23 - Skelmorlie felt the same as the rest but come September he felt he really wanted something to show for 2020 so he had a few weekends with very limited visitors. Like two if from the same family otherwise one with a short time limit underground and all the masks/sanitising/distancing etc catered for.

The now opened Gairloch Museum created from the former AAOR that I have reported on in the past won a prestigious award this month - Art Fund Museum of the Year 2020. I have looked at their website and they have a gallery called Three Wars. I hope this will be WW1, 2 and Cold. We gave them a lot of help when they first bought the AAOR as The Cold War was new to them. Hopefully I will be able to make the five hour road journey 230 miles north west of Arbroath at some stage and be able to give a fuller report.

The Arbroath Post ticks over, mainly behind the scenes and makes up the rest of my report.

### **Dun 38 Post - Arbroath**

In March of this year and with a heavy heart I had to start cancelling pre booked Spring open days at The Arbroath 'ROC Post' Museum. Our first visit was 29 April from a local Rotary Group. We were disappointed not to be able to welcome them. Our local Rotary Clubs make a standard £100 donation when they visit voluntary groups and with the PL/EL Insurance due it would have been nice to have had that in the bank.

Not all was lost though. A sharp eyed member of my Team spotted a two liner in the local paper offering 10 grants of £250 each to Tayside Museums financially hurt by Covid. The grants offered were from The Abertay Historical Society a part of Dundee University's History Dept.

I made preliminary contact and was not surprised that they had no knowledge of us - they do now! I completed the application forms and submitted them with plenty of supporting documentation about our endeavours. A few weeks later I received a cheque for £250!

By May it was clear I was going to have to make some decisions. Ifs and buts and maybes for the season ahead were taking over my life. I sent a round Robin to my team of ten advising that our beloved venue would be closed completely for the rest of the year including our ROCA BBQ when we have visitors from all the Scottish Groups and a few who stray over the Border. This also included our regular work parties. We have a large site which requires weed control/grass cutting/strimming and nurturing of our small orchard which produces fruit for Johan's jam making which she sells for funds. Our above ground buildings also need TLC during the summer months of reasonable working weather.

My Team are in their 70s/80s - some shielding for their own benefit, or for others in their household, so closing the hatch completely seemed the best thing to do.

For the last eleven years we have taken part in Doors Open Days Weekend in September. This is co-ordinated by The Scottish Civic Trust and local Councils and also forms part of European Heritage Days. This year the programme went digital only and we were invited to submit a Presentation. My first attempt at this sort of thing. The Team were talking about me being filmed doing an underground tour this year but too late for that now. I set about putting a 16 minute slideshow together which kept me well occupied during lockdown.

It was viewed 226 times during the Doors Open weekend on the Doors Open website. Far more people than we can put through physically over a weekend due to size limitation. It is now available to view on YouTube at:-

[https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=eZSv2\\_0Hns](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=eZSv2_0Hns)

The year has not been without enquiries forwarded North from Edwina when they involve Scotland and from people who track me down from various different avenues including Tayside Fire and Rescue who wished to start confined space rescue exercises at the Post. I have been trying to set this up for a few years but contacts move on so I was very pleased. However the date in April for the Watch Commander to come and do a recce and risk assessment had to be shelved. He has since had a bout of Covid himself so now on hold.

I have two students from Stirling and Edinburgh Universities in the wings desperate to visit to further their studies in the field of The Cold War.

An interesting enquiry via the Heritage Team came from a researcher in the US. He is researching the crash in 1942 of a Sunderland Flying Boat with the Duke of Kent on board who perished. This incident was very hushed up at the time. What has this to do with the ROC you might ask? The researcher had found a reference to a William Sullivan of the ROC having 'heard' the Sunderland as it passed over his Post at Lower Newport North of Wick and wondered if I had any further information on the subject. I was struggling with this as so little in the easily accessible public domain. I contacted Jim Mackie of 25 Group. Jim subscribes to the British Newspaper Archive and sends the Heritage Team many interesting articles. He came up trumps and I now have many newspaper articles to digest and pass on to the researcher in the US. The ROC travels far!

As a diversion I saw 10 blue office chairs advertised for sale on a local Facebook page for £20. They are now stacked in our lecture area ready to replace our odd mixture of seats and will look so much better.

Another diversion took me to Aberdeen in August to pick up donations from the family of an old timer - not much short of three clasps, who died last year at the age of 94. I am busy cataloguing at the moment. There are some lovely memories and very special pieces amongst the goodies. I find it very emotional when going through donations from a bereaved person. In this case so many things were kept for all those years such was his dedication to his Service in the Corps.

Another breath of fresh air. In August I saw a post again on a local Facebook page advising voluntary groups that the Arbroath Improvement Trust was meeting in a couple of weeks to decide who to donate monies to this year. I quickly applied for an application form. Again we were unknown to them. We had acquired a new door to replace a rotting one on the lecture room and I had a quote in from a joinery company of £360 to fit it. So I applied for this amount plus 40 hours of gardening work at £10 per hour as by now nature had well and truly taken over. It really shows how the hard work of The Team keeps the place looking good. I rounded to £750 and submitted with lots of documentation to explain who and what we are. I really didn't hold out much

hope. A few weeks ago a knock at the door. A stranger asked if I was Cheryl Stewart. I've brought you a cheque from the AIT. I was almost lost for words! So two chance observations of ads has helped us a great deal this year.

On the 23d October 2020 it will be five years since The Laying Up of The Banner at St Clement Danes. A very memorable day.

It was also the day our 28 Group member and former Chief Observer of the Arbroath Post experienced a massive heart attack as we approached the Courtyard of St Clement Danes. Thanks to the quick actions of former ROC members, The RAF and the prompt arrival of Paramedics Charlie was brought back to life and he spent a month in St Thomas' Hospital before returning home to convalesce. He is now 84 enjoying life to the full and we see him at our monthly ROCA Zoom meetings. Few of our members are PC friendly so only six of us meet this way but better than nothing as we presently are not allowed to visit other's homes let alone have Group meetings, when Charlie is always present.

I have ordered a ROC wreath which I will lay at our local War Memorial at a small ceremony in lieu of our usual small contingent who March with the Groups Banner through the town's streets to the Memorial.

I just hope that next year will see us back in action at the Post and the rest of the Scottish ROC folk resuming their activities.

**Cheryl Stewart**