I was approached by Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands (ARCH) to see if we could put on an event in conjunction with the Highland Archaeology Festival in October. After a little consideration I thought the Dingwall Scottish Country Dance Club could rise to the occasion and we have decided to run a Tea Dance in the Findon Hall taking the form of a tour around the Highlands and Islands, with a few detours to adjacent areas! This, unlike our previous Tea Dances, is not aimed at beginners and less experienced dancers but all are welcome. All dances will be recapped and some will be walked.

I hope that you will enjoy the dance.

If you are interested in archaeology or are surprised to find that there is a Highland Archaeology Festival in October and would be interested in finding out more check out the following websites:

http://www.archhighland.org.uk/index.asp

http://www.highlandarchaeologyfestival.org/

I have put together some information on the sites which could be linked to the dances. Read on if you are interested!

Fiona

The Moray Reel
Moray is rich with archaeological sites and artefacts. Two good places to start are at the Museums in Elgin and Forres.

Elgin Museum has an extensive collection of Scottish archaeology. Highlights include the Birnie Hoard – a changing display of objects belonging to National Museum Scotland from Dr Fraser Hunter’s excavations at nearby Birnie, including two Roman silver coin hoard. There are also Pictish stones from Kinneddar (Lossiemouth) and Burghead, a collection of Neolithic stone balls and an Early Bronze Age cist from Roseisle. http://www.museumsgalleriesscotland.org.uk/member/elgin-museum

Falconer Museum, Forres
The collection shows the great richness of prehistory in Moray. Thousands of objects tell the partly-revealed story: tiny Neolithic flint bird points, thick pot sherds from Bronze Age burials,
Roman brooches, glass fragments from vanished cathedrals, jet beads, glass beads, and notched iron blades. Swords and spindle-whorls, flint knives and quernstones.
http://falconermuseum.co.uk/

**Sueno's Stone**

The massive (23 feet, 7 metres, high) 9th century Sueno's Stone at Forres in Moray. It is the largest known Pictish sculptured stone. On one side is a large cross. On the other side are scenes of fighting and killing, dead and decapitated bodies...almost a hundred figures in all.
http://www.ancient-scotland.co.uk/site/141

**The Quern**

Archeology for Communities in the Highlands (ARCH) consider that quernstones have not got the attention they deserve! “This unglamorous artefact was essential for survival, from prehistoric times onwards, to grind grain. Sizes vary from large millstones used in water-powered mills, to smaller rotary querns used in households. Rotary querns in particular were used over a long period, from around 2500 years ago into the 1900s.

Excavations at sites like High Pasture Cave on Skye have shown that quernstones also had religious significance in prehistoric times, carefully deposited in caches at key ritual sites, probably with symbolism relating to fertility.

A project in Moray looking for quernstones has shown the potential of focussing attention on these objects. They are durable and survive, often reused in rockeries and dykes. Farmers continue to plough them up.”
ARCH would like to hear if you know of any querns, perhaps in rockeries or built into dykes.
http://www.archhighland.org.uk/index.asp

**The Weaver**

Before weaving it is essential to be able to spin. For a very long time, the drop-spindle was used to spin wool and linen yarn. Two types of drop-spindle were known in the Highlands and Islands. There was a notch at the top of both types. A whorl was a disc made of wood, stone, clay, horn or metal. A whorl was sometimes called a "troman" because it is slightly heavy to keep the spindle going when it is turned. There was another kind of drop-spindle commonly used. It was a stick of wood without a whorl at the bottom. The bottom was much more thick, and the weight of the bottom part kept the spindle turning.
http://www.scran.ac.uk/packs/exhibitions/learning_materials/webbss/dealbhmor_aodach_Beurla.html
Cloth-making was women’s work and the tedious chores were often enlivened by groups of carders and spinners coming together to sing while they toiled. Before the Cheviot and Blackface sheep were introduced to the Islands, the small native tan-faced sheep was shorn for its wool.

The wool was scoured in rainwater softened with bran and the fleece was opened out and dipped in the heated soapy solution. When it was clean, with the natural greases removed, the soggy mass was rinsed out and laid on the grass or heather to dry. A mordant was used to fix the dye; this could be urine which was kept in a special tub, and tipped into a pot of water; the wool was submerged in the liquid. Slowly, the dye liquid was brought to the boil. A stream was chosen for dyeing and beside it, a large iron pot was placed over a peat fire. In the steaming water, the colourful leaves were infused.

It all became easier when the muckle wheel appeared; later a wheel with a foot treadle was introduced and in about 1800 a flyer was adopted which allowed the yarn to be automatically wound on to the spindle. Although spinning was less strenuous than hand carding, it took up 50% of the total time taken to convert the wool into a finished web of cloth. The vertical warp threads were arranged by winding them round pegs attached to a frame; they were removed in the form of a running chain and attached to the warp beam of the loom. Much cloth used to be woven on the hand loom called the bearst bheag (small loom), its shuttle, a sheep’s shin bone, was thrown by hand.

Before an Act of the Scottish Parliament made it compulsory for all of the “laborious classes” to weave what became known in the Isles as “riochd-mallaichte” – the accursed grey, the Hebrideans were a multi-coloured people. The numbers of colours appearing on a garment gave indication of rank: one was for servants: two for rent-paying farmers: three for officers: five for chiefs: six for poets and seven for kings and queens.

Woven cloth consists of two sets of threads, or yarn. The warp runs lengthwise, the weft across the cloth. Warping is still done by hand and involves arranging yarn according to a colour sequence on a tiered hank of bobbins and winding it onto a frame of wooden Pegs. The yarn is then gathered together in long hanks and distributed to the weaver along with the necessary amount of weft.

**Telford Hornpipe**

This dance was written to commemorate Sir Thomas Telford the Scotsman who laid the foundations of industrial Britain, the Colossus of Roads and the godfather of civil engineering.

Born in the Scottish Borders in 1757 Telford never knew his shepherd father as he died a few months after he was born. Raised by relatives he left school at the of 14 and became a stonemason’s apprentice.
Despite long working days by night Telford studied to learn all there is about construction. He moved to Edinburgh and later to London. He worked on projects all over Britain.

Probably his best known work in the Highlands was the construction of the Caledonian Canal. Work started in 1802 and those made homeless by the Highland Clearances were given a chance to earn a living. The project went over budget and overtime and by the time it was completed the Canal was too small to take the steam ships which were now common. Although commercially a failure the Canal remains a reminder of his skill as a civil engineer. It is popular for leisure sailors now.

http://www.history.co.uk/biographies/thomas­telford

In 1801 the Government asked Thomas Telford to develop his earlier work on harbours and piers with a survey of roads across Scotland. This revealed a network that barely existed north and west of the Great Glen. Over the 20 years from 1804 Telford followed up his survey with the construction of over 920 miles of road and 120 bridges in the Highlands. During this period he also built many harbours and jetties in Scotland as well as the Caledonian Canal. At the same time he continued his work south of the border, notably on the London to Holyhead road. He also worked abroad, designing the Gotha Canal for the King of Sweden.

In 1818 Thomas Telford became the first President of the Institution of Civil Engineers. In 1823 he returned to Scotland to begin construction of 32 standardised "Parliamentary Churches" across the Highlands and Islands, each comprising a T-shaped church and an accompanying manse. When completed in 1830 this programme had cost a total of £54,500.

http://www.undiscoveredscotland.co.uk/usbiography/t/thomastelford.html

A local example is Kinlochluichart Church which dates from 1827 and still in use today while others, like, Poolewe is no longer in use and is on the Buildings At Risk Register for Scotland.

http://www.buildingsatrisk.org.uk/ref_no/1242?

Culloden Links

If one thinks of Culloden one usually thinks of the battle field but the links have more recent history too.

Culloden might have been the last battle of the Jacobite risings, but it was the first battlefield in Scotland to be subject to archaeological investigation. The first phase of this long-term project took place in 2001 as part of the BBC television series Two Men in a Trench but has since continued under the auspices of the National Trust for Scotland as part of the Culloden Battlefield Memorial Project. The investigation carried out by the Centre for Battlefield Archaeology has included topographic, geophysical and metal detector surveys along with
archaeological excavation.  
http://www.gla.ac.uk/schools/humanities/research/archaeology

The Fighting Fourth: No 4 Commando at War 1940-45
By James Dunning records HMS Astrid practice of landings from amphibious vehicles in preparation of the D-Day landings. These went on by day and by night along with other training for 16 days in March 1944. Before going south for further training before the actual landings in France.

The Waternish Tangle

Waternish is the Middle Peninsula to the north of Skye. The name comes from the Gaelic Bhatarnais itself derived from vadv, the Old Norse for water. The old road for Waternish leaves from the The Fairy bridge. This is a stone built bridge between Edinbane and Dunvegan where the Chief of the MacLeods was given the fairy flag for protection before his fairy wife left him forever and returned to her people.

The beautifully whitewashed buildings of Stein are bedecked with dormer windows that look over the bay. Planned as a fishing village by the British Fisheries Society, Stein was designed by Thomas Telford in 1790. It is ironic that this master of design came undone in remote Skye but it is true that his plans for Stein ground to a halt in 1798 and were never completed.

The archaeology in Waternish is worth mentioning. There is the incongruous and slightly disappointingly ruined Temple of Anaitis. It is unknown if the temple’s history dates back to the start of Christianity on the island or before. It is a pleasant place to visit and imagine the wooden statue of the goddess leading a procession to the river to be washed and blessed. Dun Hallin broch to the East of Hallin makes for another interesting walk with views over Dunvegan head.

The ruined church of Trumpan was the site of brutal guerrilla warfare between The MacLeods and the MacDonalds. All save one of the MacLeod villagers of Trumpan were burned alive inside the church. The one who escaped fetched the MacLeod army who killed all the MacDonalds in Blar Milleadh a’ Ghàraidh the Battle of the Spoiling Dyke. From here there is a walk of about 4 miles each way that takes you from Trumpan to the lighthouse at Waternish Point. On the way there are more brochs; Dun Borrafiach is fairly well preserved but Dun Gearymore is badly ruined.

https://www.isleofskye.com/waternish

The Cromartie Rant

The Earl of Cromartie, Chief of the Clan MacKenzie and Caberfei resides at Castle Leod a few miles west of Dingwall and so has to be included in our tour.
For more information look at the following website:

http://clanmackenziesociety.co.uk/clan-chief/

The Quaich
Quaichs were the traditional two handled or lugged drinking vessels. The word quaich comes from Gaelic cuach, meaning cup. Early quaichs may have been made as solid pieces. In the 17th century coopered quaichs made of feathered staves began to appear. Their making was a skilled task which gave greater opportunity for decoration.

Small quaich made of wooden staves with silver mounts. The base has a silver band, the handles are capped with silver, and a silver boss is inset into the base. The handles are engraved WR and AM, and the silver boss is engraved NOBILIS EST IRA LEONIS with three lions rampant for Ross of Priesthill.

This example belongs to the Tain and District Museum

http://www.scran.ac.uk/database/record.php?usi=000-000-508-957-C&scache=2m24j29wfj&searchdb=scran

Tolsta Rant

Now we venture over the Minch to the east coast of Lewis.

The Hebrides have many archaeological sites such as Cananais and Barpa Langais in North Uist.
The name, Tolstadh, reflects the arrival of the Norse people in the islands around about AD 800. The last part of the name, -stadh, is from the Old Norse word staðir, which means 'farm'. The first part is a contraction of a personal name, perhaps Thorkell. Although the name of the township must have changed at this time, many archaeologists believe that the Norse who settled in the Hebrides mixed with the existing population. One of the reasons for believing this is that we know that many of the first generation of pagan Norse in the islands converted to Christianity as a result of being exposed to it here, and they took the new religion back to Scandinavia, and onwards to Iceland. The Western Isles were a part of Norway for nearly 500 years.

Of particular interest was the grassy hollow, Slag an t-Searmoin, where preaching took place during the Reformation - this is the type of site that archaeologists cannot hope to identify alone, as the feature is a natural one, but used for crucially important gatherings in the history of the township. I hope that there will be possibilities in the future to encourage the Comann Eachdraidh and archaeologists to work together to learn more about the history and archaeology of the district.

http://www.tolsta.info/index.php/timeline/18-pre-history/4-the-archaeology-of-tolsta

The Ladies of Dingwall

As we are the Dingwall Scottish Country Dance Club I felt we could not leave Dingwall out of our tour!

Dingwall’s thing (Viking Parliament) site is thought to have been located on the site which is now the Cromartie Memorial car park.

Very little is known about an assembly here and only the place name gives any indication of it ever having existed. Scholars assumed the town had been built over it and that only a future accident of archaeology would allow its discovery. The sagas do not mention a thing at Dingwall or anywhere else in the north of mainland Scotland. This mystery is heightened by the fact that there is little historical or archaeological evidence for Norse or Viking settlement in the area, despite there being a large number of Norse place names within the county.

Local tradition suggests that the thing was held on the eastern slope of Gallows Hill, roughly 600 m west of the medieval town. However, recent historical research has revealed the actual location is the mound on which the Cromartie Memorial now stands. The site exhibits many features typically associated with thing sites. The field adjacent to the mound (now the site of a petrol station) would have been the gathering place for those attending the thing. The site has links with the nearby Kirk, and Gallows Hill would have been a place of execution from the Norse period onwards.

Around 1710, Sir George Mackenzie the first Earl of Cromartie erected a large obelisk on the
top of the thing mound. After his death in 1714 he was buried beside it, an act which has ensured the survival of the mound today. By 1917 the monument had begun to lean so dangerously it had to be removed, and in 1923 was replaced by the smaller structure we see today. In 1947 much of the mound was levelled to make way for a car park. Only the central part containing the burial place of the Earl now remains.

Ground penetrating radar survey revealed evidence of a possible ditch running around the mound © Dr Oliver O'Grady

For many years Dingwall's thing has proved to be a puzzle for historians and archaeologists. Recently, members of Dingwall History Society were able to unlock the secrets of its location. The answer lay in three documents, which when put together finally revealed the location of Dingwall's lost thing site. The first, a document from 1503, details how James Duke of Ross gave up all his lands in Ross with the exception of the moothill of Dingwall. Possession of the moothill was enough to allow him to retain the title of Duke of Ross, demonstrating the continued importance of the site at the time. According to this document the moothill lay directly beside the town, rather than at a distance, as is often expected. The second clue is found in the Earl of Cromartie’s title deed, dated 1672, to a piece of land in Dingwall known as the Hillyard. Moot hills were often referred to simply as hill and the document confirms this connection, describing the property as “"ye mute hill of Dinguall.” The final clue can be found in 18th century land records, which record that the Hillyard, or Yardhill is “now the burial place of the family of Cromartie” better known today as the Cromartie Car Park.

These discoveries have allowed archaeological work to be undertaken at the Dingwall thing site for the first time ever. In 2011 a ground penetrating radar survey was carried out in the car park. The results begin to shed light on the site's fascinating past. It shows the original extent of the mound, and what Dr Oliver O'Grady and members of the Dingwall History Society survey the Cromartie Car Park appears to be a large ditch running around the site from the old shoreline as well as a possible entrance in the southwest. As at Tynwald Hill in the Isle of Man, it is possible that the Dingwall thing site had close links with the nearby church. A feature which may be a bridge or causeway over the ditch can be seen on the North West side facing the church, and there is also a suggestion of a buried road surface passing under Church Street between the two.

Other notable features include a possible prehistoric monument beneath the mound, and even evidence of the Victorian excavations undertaken to locate the burial place of George, Earl of Cromartie. These results are just the first tantalising glimpses into the story of Dingwall’s thing site. Further survey and excavation will reveal more about its history, and there are plans to open a heritage hub on the site to tell the story fully.

http://www.thingsites.com/thing-site-profiles/dingwall-scotland
Flower of the Quern

See previous information on querns.

The Recumbent Stone

This dance was devised by John Drewry to commemorate the stone circle at Easter Aquhorthies north west of Inverurie.

Easter Aquhorthies Stone Circle is a recumbent stone circle – a monument type only found in north-east Scotland. It has a large stone set on its side and flanked by two upright stones, usually on the south or south-west part of the circle.

The stones here appear to have been chosen for their colour. They’re all rough, pinkish porphyry, except for:
(i) the stone next to the east flanker, which is red jasper
(ii) the two flanking stones, either side the recumbent stone, which are grey granite
(iii) the recumbent stone, which is made of red granite quarried from near Bennachie

https://www.historicenvironment.scot/visit-a-place/places/easter-aquhorthies-stone-circle/

The Old Man of Storr

http://staffin-trust.co.uk/old-man-of-storr-site-options-to-be-investigated-as-key-contract-awarded

Geologically the Old Man is of great interest.
The Singing Sands

Gortenfern beach is lovely sandy beach and a great place for beachcombing and exploring the rocky coastline. The beach and surrounding area was used for commando training during the Second World War and may contain unexploded munitions, so please take care. A battle associated with the 1745 uprising is also believed to have been fought here.

http://www.wildlochaber.com/ardnamurchan/walking/ockle-singing-sands

Firth of Beauly

The marine crannogs in the Beauly Firth have recently been investigated and radiocarbon dates from three of the sites indicate that they were constructed and used in the later Bronze Age and Iron Age.

http://www.morayfirth-partnership.org/coastalarchaeology.html

I hope that you will enjoy our dancing tour around archaeological and historical sites in the Highlands and Islands.