

**Heritage Society** - The last meeting of the Dornoch Heritage Society was a double bill from Peter and Sally Wild.

The evening opened with Peter talking about Robert Hamilton Bruce who, around 1895, built what is now the Royal Golf Hotel.

Bruce was born in 1846 and spent much of his early years in the family home of Falkland Palace. His eldest brother inherited it all when his father died, but then slowly sold it to pay debts. By 31, Bruce had become a successful businessman and was a partner in a Glasgow firm of flour importers.

In 1880, aged 34, he married Fanny but she died only a year later. Distracted with grief he was restless and spent much time travelling abroad.

It was during this time that he started collecting paintings, books and antiques. Through one of his art circle friends, he met Katherine Louise (Kitty) whom he married in 1891 aged 45. He was to have six children with Kitty.

He was now also making plans to retire. With his great enthusiasm for golf, Dornoch was an obvious choice. In January 1892 he applied for permission to "erect a Residence, Stable Offices, and enclosing walls & railings ... on the South by the Property of Rev. George Kennedy and the Links".

His new purpose-built house would display his vast art collection, which by then included many major works. He was not in Dornoch long as he died in 1899.

The Grange became the Royal Golf Hotel. Few entering today will realise how once the walls hung heavy with paintings and tapestries; antique-filled rooms, lit by

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chandeliers with rugs and comfy chairs beside roaring fires; and shelves full of books. Outside, the gardens were filled with deep herbaceous borders.

In the second half of the evening Sally talked about clutie rugs in the Highlands, showing many different types of construction and patterns with pictures from Wick Heritage Museum, Hugh Miller's Cottage and Laidhay Croft Museum.

Sally was introduced to clutie rugs through the help of Miss Roxburgh from Golspie, and the late Kate Thomson of Rogart, and has over the years made many rugs herself. She described how they would start off life in the bedroom before going to the parlour then to the scullery and finally ending up in the byre for the dog to lie on. Recycling at its best!

The next event is a coffee morning on 9th May in the Dornoch Social Club at 10.30am.

**SWI** - Rev Hilary Gardner from Ardgay gave members a very interesting talk, accompanied by slides, of her life and work in Azerbaijan more than 14 years ago.

Hilary worked with BP during that time and travelled throughout the country. Azerbaijan is divided partially between Eastern Europe and Western Asia. On its eastern side lies the Caspian Sea with Russia to the north.

Hilary's slides showed many different regions in the country from desert in the south to beautiful mountains in the north.

Baku, the capital, has grown into a highly developed modern city but the surrounding villages still remain untouched with poor lifestyles for the people. Azerbaijan's economy mainly depends on oil and natural gas production.

Hilary was thanked on behalf of the members for her most informative talk by Kath Munro.