

Bid to learn more about everyday life at Skibo Castle

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THE Carnegie Club at Skibo Castle is inviting anyone who lived or worked on the Skibo estate over the years – or whose relatives did – to come and share their memories at a special evening to be held at Dornoch Social Club.

On Wednesday, 1st July, between 6pm and 9pm, the club is to host a “Memories of Skibo” night.

Today the Carnegie Club is the largest private employer in the region but the number of people who work at Skibo today is dwarfed by the numbers who lived and worked on the estate in the past when, during the Carnegie family era (1898-1982), the estate comprised more than 20,000 acres and encompassed the settlements of Clashmore to the east and Bonar Bridge to the west. For much of the 20th century there were few in the region who could not claim a connection to Skibo.

Skibo has a rich history, having been home to occupants as varied as the Vikings, the Bishops of Caithness, members of Parliament, and – perhaps most famously – Dunfermline-born steel baron, Andrew Carnegie.

Today Skibo Castle is a Grade A listed treasure and every care is taken to preserve the historic building and estate.

The club’s interest in Skibo’s past is driven by managing director Peter Crome, who in recent years has overseen a number of large scale restoration projects there, including the conservation of the garden’s Edwardian Mackenzie & Moncur glasshouses, the refurbishment of the original 1899 wooden flooring in the castle’s Great Hall and repair to the 115-year-old wallpaper in the billiard room.

Recognising the significance of the castle and estate’s unique history and the need to record it, Peter created the post of club archivist in

2013, employing Dr Victoria Connor to collate the many historical items and documents stored across the castle into a centralised archive.

These materials included a huge array of different types of material including legal documents, clippings, correspondence, photographs as well as ephemera such as postcards and headed stationary.

Anything that relates to the history of Skibo is considered of value and – as Skibo has been around in one form or another since the Viking Jarl Sigurth Eysteinnson arrived in Sutherland in the 9th century – that encompasses an enormous amount of material.

While some periods of Skibo’s history have been documented in detail there are aspects that are underrepresented in the archive, most notably the lives of the many hundreds of people who lived and worked on the estate through the years.

Peter says that the Carnegie Club

is contacted regularly by individuals, both from home and abroad, searching for information about relatives who had some historical connection to Skibo.

So far, however, there is little information on most of the Skibo staff and tenants beyond their name in the ledger books.

Victoria says: “History has tended to be written about the rich and important. There are lots of books about Andrew Carnegie, but none about his valet or housekeeper. Newspapers printed pictures of Carnegie, but we have very little idea what his staff looked like and what day-to-day life at Skibo was like for them.”

Peter said: “The Carnegie Club can only fill these gaps in its archive with the help of the local community and the relatives of those who once lived and worked at Skibo.”

The club has already had a number of individuals contact them to share photographs of parents and



Estate workers at Skibo in 1901.

grandparents who once worked for the Carnegie family, including information on a carpenter who carved his initials into the Skibo stables wall as it was being constructed circa 1899 (and whose handiwork can still be seen today); a footman and housemaid who married and emigrated to Canada; and a gardener in the 1970s.

Each batch of photographs and accompanying information has enhanced the archive and allowed the Carnegie Club to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of life at Skibo through the 20th century.

Building on this, the Carnegie Club has organised “Memories of

Skibo”. The club organisers are eager to learn more about all aspects of the estate’s history, so whether people or their relatives worked as household or estate staff, delivered the coal, attended the Skibo school, serviced Carnegie’s fleet of Skibo cars or fed the cows at the Skibo dairy, the club would be delighted to hear from them.

Peter said: “Memories of Skibo” will not just fill in some of the gaps in our knowledge regarding Skibo’s past, but it will also give us a better understanding of the important role Skibo has played in the Highlands throughout the years.”

The Carnegie Club invites those who grew up or worked on the

estate over the years, or their relatives, to go to the Dornoch Social Club on 1st July, anytime between 6pm and 9pm, to share their memories of Skibo and any photographs they may have for the club to copy for the Skibo archive.

Any material gathered on the night will also be shared with Historylinks, Dornoch, so that the material gathered will be publicly accessible.

On the night there will also be a small exhibition on the history of Skibo as well as a slideshow presentation showing Skibo through the years.

All are welcome to attend and refreshments will be provided.