

Our Environment, Our Heritage

*A project by
the members of the
Young Curators Club*



Introduction

The Young Curators' *Our Environment, Our Heritage* project was launched as soon as we were able to meet outdoors again after the Covid lockdown in the late spring of 2021. We began by growing vegetables in the Museum garden and ended with the production of individual project record books and a Museum display. Along the way, the YCC visited woodland, created new folktales, went apple picking, did dry point etching, leaf printing, lichen dyeing, willow weaving, apple pressing, cooking, and other crafts, and raised money for the Museum Extension Fund at their Christmas Fair.

Completed at the end of March 2022, the project provided a year of busy YCC meetings, new and interesting activities, much laughter and, less happily, Covid-dodging. A very big THANK YOU to all who joined and helped us on this journey by sharing their time and skills, and to all our generous Funders. Without this considerable input, our project would not have been possible.

St Finbarr's Charity Shop

Dornoch Geriatric Golfers

Highland Council Ward Fund

Hugh Fraser Foundation TURCAN CONNELL



Local Community Fund



ROYAL DORNOCH



Dig for Dornoch

We began our project by thinking about how people used their immediate environment - their gardens and allotments - to support themselves and their local community during World War II when there were food shortages and rationing. We talked about the 'Dig for Victory' campaign and thought about the parallels with our own lives during the time of Covid. We had come out of the first lockdown but were not yet allowed to meet indoors again so we got together outside and started our own YCC vegetable garden - 'Dig for Dornoch' - at the Museum. We wanted to grow vegetables for the local community and our visitors.

The vegetable seedlings, along with bags of compost, were generously donated by Mairi MacPherson of Highland Seedlings at Fearn. We helped Dave Mahoney to paint the raised beds he had built and he put the logos on for us. Dornoch Distillery kindly gave us two wooden barrels for growing more vegetables and some more soil was donated by YCC parents. We had a small greenhouse for the tomatoes and cucumbers, and a water butt to collect rainwater. Soon we were ready to go.

We filled the beds with soil. The feel of the earth on our skin was great. We planted out the delicate seedlings then labelled and watered them. Over the following weeks we visited the garden to water and weed and watch as the plants grew. It was really exciting to see the vegetables appearing. We grew lettuce, courgettes, tomatoes, kale, cucumbers, beetroot, cauliflowers, runner and broad beans, and broccoli. We had to make sure the cabbage white caterpillars didn't eat them before we could harvest and give them away! Eventually, some very happy locals and visitors got to take a lot of vegetables home, and we kept some to use later in the project.



One of the raised beds made for the project by Museum Volunteer, Dave Mahoney



Isla, Scarlett, Ruby-Kay, Daniel and Aine transfer the compost into a raised bed



Maisie, Mary, Layla, Jessie and Darcey planting out the seedlings

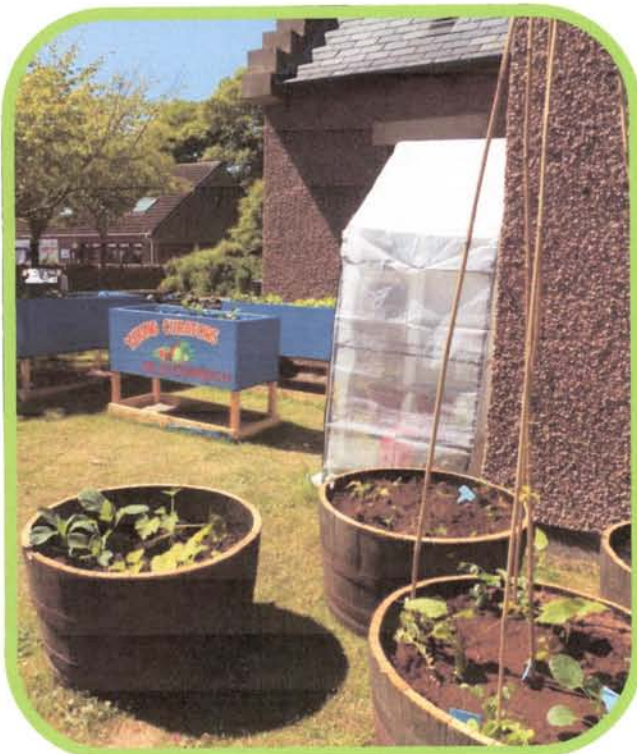
*Jessie looks on as
Scarlett waters
the plants*



A happy local



All planted out



Story writing

After our visit to Camore Woods, Trish told us about the ancient Ogham alphabet which was used in the time before the Latin alphabet was known. Many people then spoke an early form of Gaelic and, if they wanted to write words down, they used the Ogham alphabet. The letters of this alphabet look like twig formations and there are several different versions. Trish used the Gaelic Tree Alphabet which has 18 letters. Each letter is linked to a different native tree and Trish explained that in ancient mythology, each of the trees had their own story associated with it. The stories weren't written down but were passed on by word of mouth as folklore from one generation to the next. In the stories, each tree had people, a mythological being and magical objects associated with it, and each story usually had a message or moral to it. Some of the stories still survive but many have been lost. Trish suggested that we choose a tree associated with the Gaelic Tree Alphabet and write a story about it to create new folklore to pass on. We worked in pairs and each pair chose a different tree. We wrote and illustrated our stories and they were made into the storybooks you can see in this display.



Trish working with Daniel and Ruby-Kay and, in the background: Andrew, Darcey and Layla

Visit to Camore Woods

As a part of her 'Lost Museum of Trees' project, Trish Matthews, Sutherland Adult Learning Co-ordinator (Literacies), from High Life Highland, joined us for the next part of our project. She told us about the native trees in Scottish woodlands and, in preparation for some activities with her, we made a visit to Camore Woods where we identified some native trees. We used wax crayons and paper to make bark rubbings of the tree trunks, and we collected leaves, Rowan berries, pine cones, and two different kinds of lichen from the forest floor. We planned to use all of these later in our project. We were lucky: the rain didn't begin to fall until we were ready to leave.



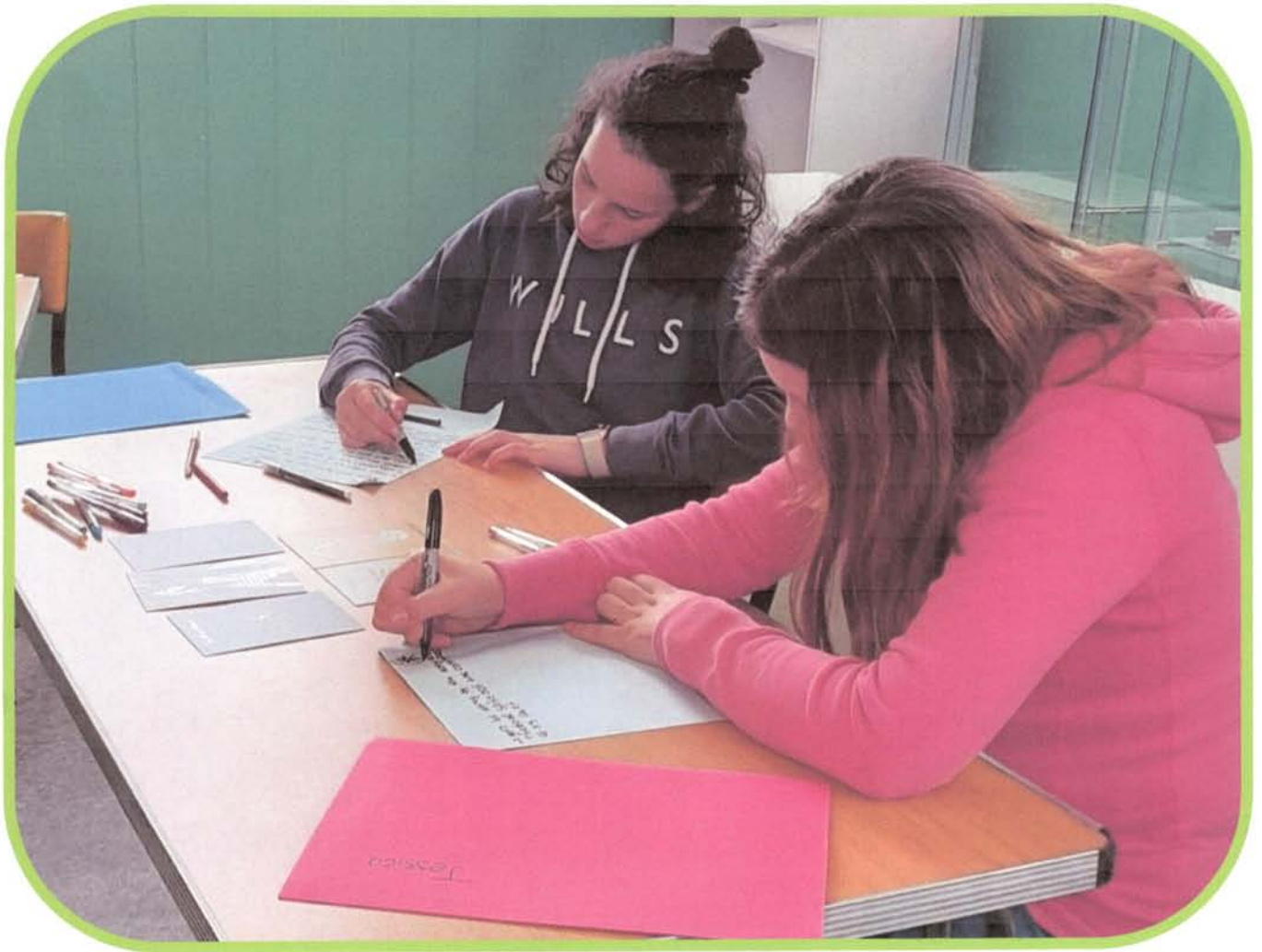
Ruby-Kay, Andrew and Leah collecting lichen



Isla and Andrew working on their story

Leah and Jessie working on theirs





Scarlett, and Jessica story writing

Leaf printing and lichen dyeing

Next we used some of the leaves and lichen we had collected at Camore Woods. With the leaves, we printed colourful designs on squares cut from old cotton sheets. We wanted to use the designs on the covers of our project record books. Trish showed us how to spread ink on a tile with a roller. We pressed our chosen leaf onto the ink, using the roller to coat it with the colour. Then we placed the leaf carefully onto the fabric, lay a sheet of paper over it and, using the roller, pressed the leaf onto the cotton. It was exciting to remove the paper and then the leaf and to see its shape and detail transferred to the fabric. Having repeated the process several times, we had some lovely patterns for our project book covers. The leaves we had left over were pressed to use later.

With the lichen we had collected, we wanted to make a natural dye to colour some home-spun woollen yarn (donated by Historylinks Trustee, Anne Coombs) to use in our concertina project and story books. Historylinks Volunteer, Sally Wild, helped us with the dye. At home, she put the lichen in water in a large jar with a teaspoon of ammonia and left it in a warm place to soak. She stirred it each day until the water had a good, rich colour. Next, she put the wool into a pan of water and added a mordant called allum. A mordant is used because it reacts with the dye and fixes the colour to the yarn so it will not wash out. Sally heated the pan and left the wool to simmer. Finally, she removed the lichen and brought the jar of dye and the wet wool to our YCC session. We added the wool to a dye bath and simmered it in the dye for an hour. During this time, the yarn changed colour, as you can see in our project books.

While we waited for the dye to take, we had a go at wool felting. We soaped our hands and rubbed pieces of carded fleece in circles in our palms until felted balls formed. It was great fun! The necklace that was made from the felt balls is in this display, under the tree.



Andrew rolls ink onto the leaf (with Lorna taking a video in the background)



Placing the leaf onto the cotton



Using the roller and paper to press the inked leaf onto the cotton



Choosing another leaf in preparation for repeating the process



Placing the leaf: the beginnings of a design

Dry point etching

At another of our sessions, Trish showed us how to make a dry point etching. We each drew or copied our chosen tree and then placed a sheet of transparent plastic over the drawing. With a special etching tool that had a very sharp point, we carefully scratched over our tree drawings, transferring the designs onto the plastic sheet. Trish took our etchings away to be inked and printed on a press in order to produce the dry point etchings you can see in our project books today. This was a new skill that we had never tried before. It was very interesting to learn about it and to have a go for ourselves.

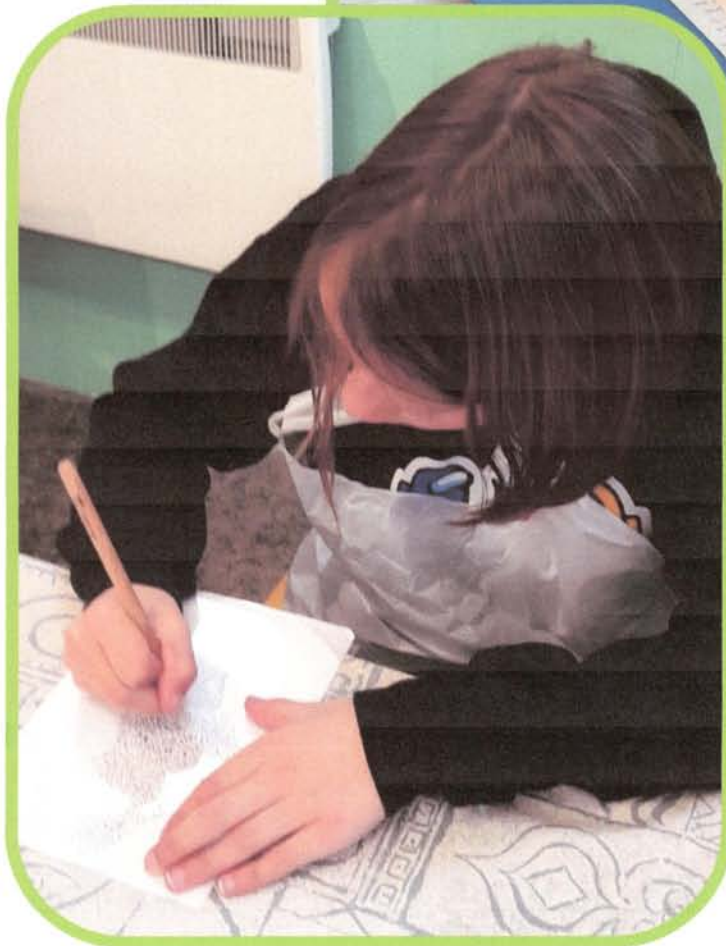
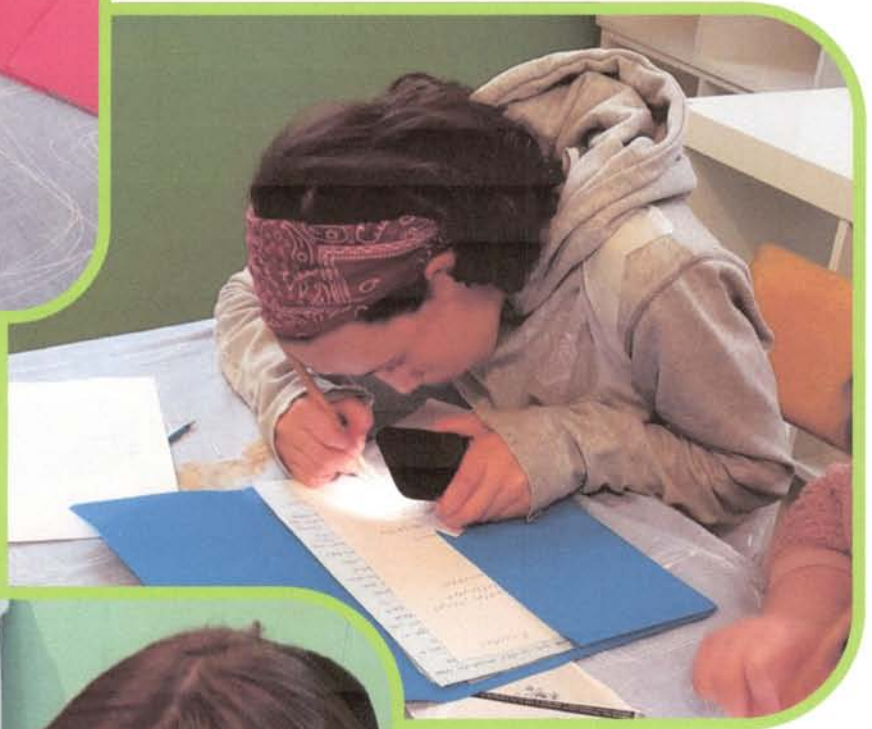
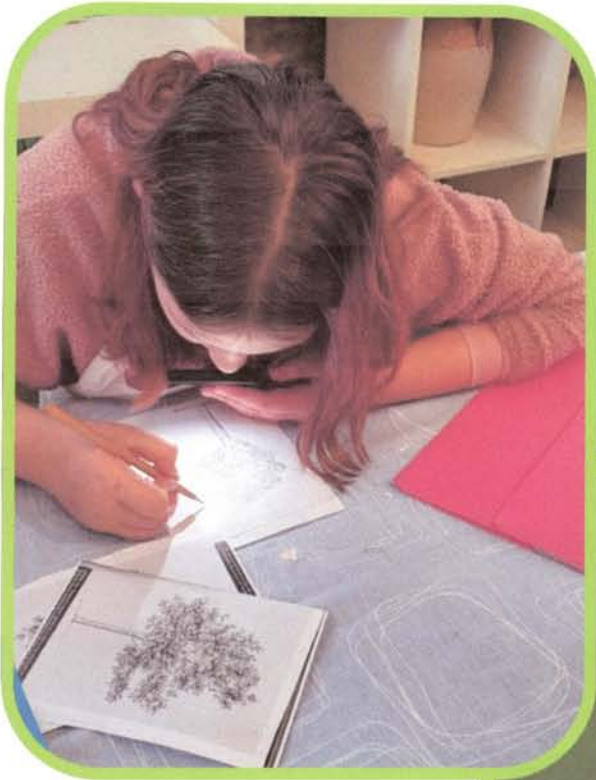


Ruby-Kay etching a picture of heather



Daniel, using the etching tool

*Jessica (top), Scarlett
(centre), and Darcey
(bottom) all intent on
etching*



Apple picking and pressing

In the late summer, we were invited by Peter and Sarah Milligan to pick apples in the orchard at Ospisdale House for use in our project. At one of our YCC sessions, we had watched a black-and-white film of boy scouts in the war picking apples as part of the Dig for Victory campaign. We felt we were following in their footsteps and we had a fantastic time. Some mums came with us and we spent a very happy hour or two in the orchard picking apples - even the high up ones! Later, we explored the beautiful garden. The weather was kind to us again; we picked many bags of apples and ate a few too! They were delicious!

*Ospisdale
House*



*The apple
orchard at
Ospisdale
House*



Picking and bagging the apples



Tired but happy: the Young Curators taste the fruits of their labours

We had planned to use the produce left from our Dig for Dornoch garden to make preserves - as people had done during wartime. With plenty of apples, and brambles from the Museum, those plans grew. We had given a lot of produce to both locals and visitors over the summer. Now we thought we could use what we had left to do our bit to help the Museum with its fundraising for a much-needed extension. As a part of our project, we would make jams, chutneys and do baking to sell at a 1940s Christmas Fair in December. We also decided to use things we could find in our natural environment and things we could upcycle to make gifts and decorations to sell at the Fair.

Lynne Mahoney, Historylinks Museum Curator, joined us for a session to tell us some more about wartime food rationing. She had made two simple wartime recipes for us to taste: mock banana made from parsnips and banana essence; and fake chocolate spread made from mashed potatoes and cocoa powder. After tasting them, we didn't think these would sell very well, but we had other ideas up our sleeves, including pressing some of the apples we had picked to make apple juice to sell at the Fair. Lynne borrowed an apple press for us and we had a practice run. It was hard work and the juice was slow to appear but when it did, we all cheered! The sip we each had tasted like nectar; apple juice was going to be a winner!



Left: the mincer



Right: the press

Below: pressing the apples was great fun



Making decorations from nature

We decided that, as ours was to be a Christmas Fair, we would like to have some decorations to sell. We wanted to make them from natural or recycled materials that were easily available, both in the 1940s and today. We came up with three different decorations.

Sally Wild knew of a local supply of New Zealand flax and we were given permission to cut some for our project. Sally came along to show us how to split the long leaves into strips, and then how to weave them into reindeer decorations which could be hung on a Christmas tree. This was quite a fiddly task, but we all made one each to sell.



Next we made twig-and-wool tree decorations. This idea had come from one of our mums. The 'trees' were really attractive and looked great hanging from a branch on our stall at the Fair.



Scarlett (above) and Leah (above right) display their finished tree decorations

Lastly, we made walnut babies. We used walnut shells, wooden beads, cotton wool, small squares of cotton sheet, and short lengths of ribbon to hang them up. These were really fiddly too, and took some time but again we all made one for the Fair.

Mary Jane working on making a walnut baby



Willow weaving

On two days in autumn, basket weaver, Tim Palmer, came to Dornoch Bowling Club Hall to introduce us to the age-old craft of willow-weaving. We had seen some of the willow hurdles woven for the Sutherland Longhouse Project on display in the Museum, and now Tim had come to help us weave bird feeders from willow. When we first saw the bundles of long, thin willow, it was difficult to imagine that we would be able to turn them into useful objects!

First, we watched as Tim demonstrated the task. He made it look so easy! He had brought wooden jigs to hold the willow stakes in place for us to weave in and out of, and this made the task easier. But we all needed a few practice attempts before we began to get the hang of it. By the end of the morning, we had each made at least one or two feeders to be proud of and we were ready for our lunch. After another demonstration from Tim in the afternoon, we made a different style of bird feeder. It was amazing to watch as they took shape. By the end of the afternoon our fingers were sore and we were tired from concentrating, but we were happy and delighted with the feeders we had made. Better still, there were enough for us to keep one or two for ourselves and still have plenty to sell at the Fair. We had had a great day, a wonderful teacher and amazing results.





Maisie (top), Scarlett (centre), and Mary Jane (bottom) working on bird feeder style 1





*Layla (top left), Daniel (top right),
Mary (bottom left) and Jessie
(bottom right) proudly display
their completed bird feeders*



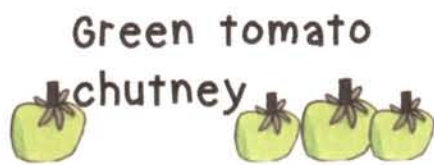
Mary (top left), Leah (top right), Jessie (bottom left) and Daniel (bottom right) working on bird feeder style 2



Cooking for the Fair

Our session cooking for the Fair with the produce we had grown or picked was such fun. Four separate work stations were set up and we were split into four pairs (only eight of us made it that evening as there had been outbreaks of Covid in the school and town, so five of us weren't there). Each pair moved from table to table and so had a turn at making every dish. We made apple and bramble crumble, green tomato chutney, blackberry and apple mincemeat, and Young Curators' Christmas Crumble. We also drew pictures of the ingredients we used to be put on labels to identify the things we made. By the end of our session we were exhausted but very happy: we had used and not wasted the food that we had grown and picked; we had made lots of crumbles; filled loads of jars; and had a few tasters ourselves, too - just to make sure our produce was good enough to sell! Also, some of the cucumbers we had grown were made into cucumber relish; Rowan berries we collected at Camore Woods were used for Rowan jelly; and strawberries and pears picked at Ospisdale were turned into strawberry or apple and pear jams. We now had plenty of preserves to sell at the Fair.

The Young Curators

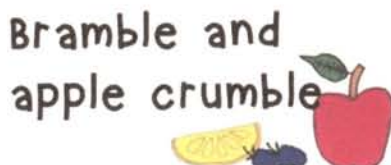


The Young Curators

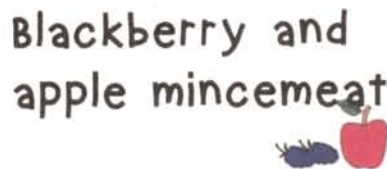


Our artwork on the labels for the produce we made

The Young Curators

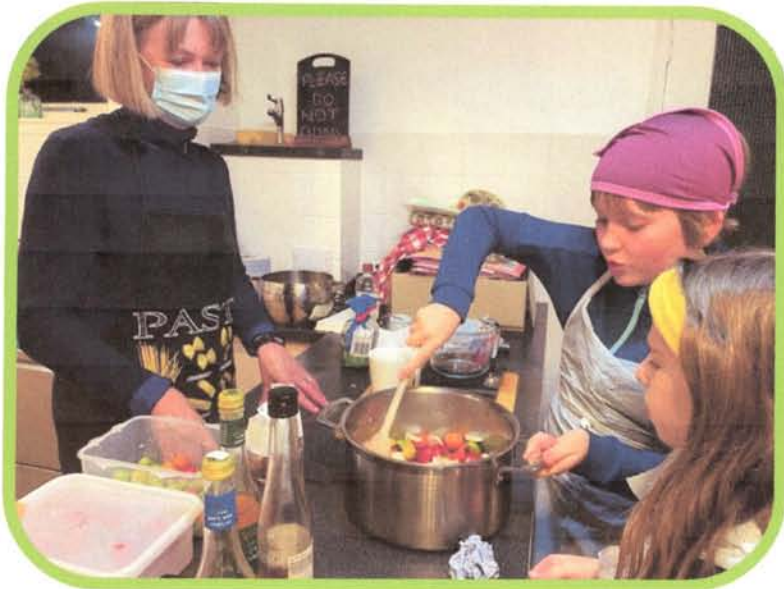


The Young Curators



Ruby-Kay and Daniel preparing bramble and apple crumble under Lorna's supervision





Isla and Layla preparing green tomato chutney with Alison



Leah and Mary Jane preparing Blackberry and apple mincemeat with Lynne



Mary, Jessie and Layla preparing Young Curators' Christmas crumble with Caroline



Draft artwork for the gift cards

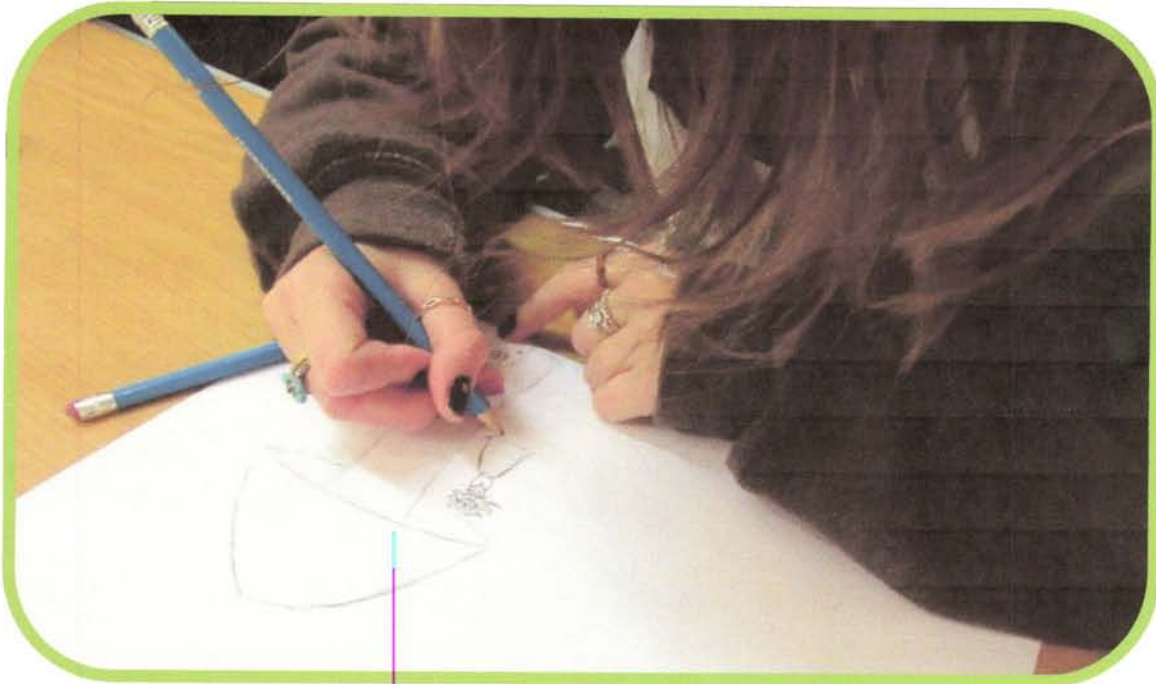
Leftover wall lining paper was used to make our gift bags. We covered the paper with colourful potato prints and made matching gift tags and wrapping paper, too. All the potato prints were of things from nature - apples, flowers, mushrooms, acorns, leaves, pine cones, and tomatoes. It was great fun seeing the designs appear as we added each potato print. The paper was folded and glued to make gift bags and the handles were made from jute twine.



Potato fun begins...

Potato printing, and drawing for the gift cards

If we were selling gifts, we thought it would be a good idea to make some gift cards, bags and tags to go with them. We decided to make cards that could be used throughout the year. Trish helped us with ideas for drawings to put on our gift cards. She showed us books with pictures of things in nature – animals and plants – as well as of mythical animals and stories, and we used these to inspire our own drawings. Trish took our work away and produced some lovely cards with our artwork. We are very proud that our own designs are on them and you can see some in this display.

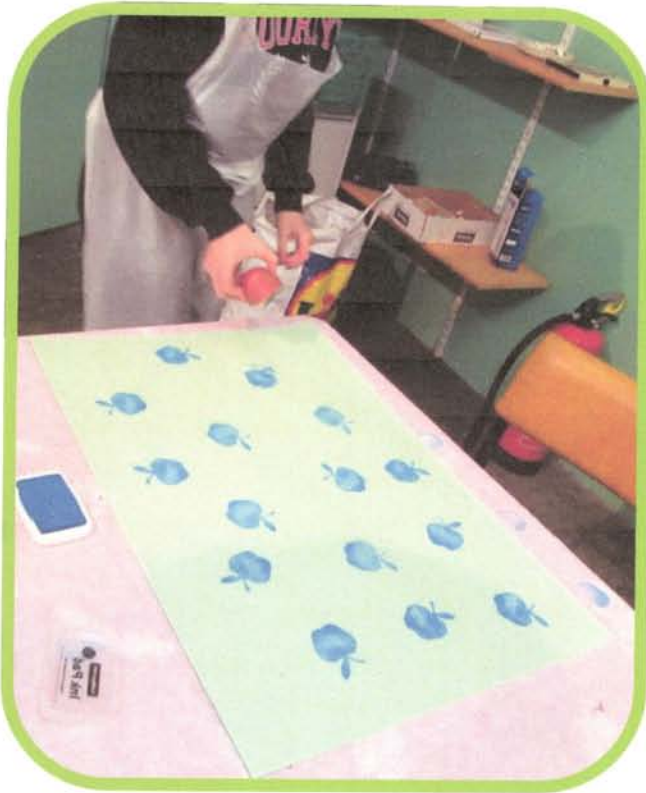


*Drawing artwork for
the gift cards.*

Top: Mary Jane

Bottom: Leah





Designs are born!



Our 1940s Christmas Fair

The Fair, to be held on 18th December at Dornoch Social Club, was advertised around the town and online. Then, just a few days beforehand, an outbreak of Covid meant that the Fair could no longer be held indoors. We did not want to give up. We wanted to carry on, like the people in the war. We decided to continue outdoors and so we got permission to set up marquees on Cathedral Green and borrowed equipment to make hot drinks for our customers (and ourselves!). Sadly, after all the hard work, only five members of YCC were able to attend; the rest were either self-isolating because of the Covid outbreak or away from Dornoch for the holidays. We are very grateful to all the adult helpers who made things to sell and who helped us to run the stalls - we would not have been able to go ahead without them.

On the day, we dressed in 1940s-style clothes and got to work setting up the stalls with our helpers. We had Christmas decorations on one stall and baking and preserves on another. We set up the apple press and began to process the fruit to make apple juice. Everyone was very busy. There was a gift stall, a raffle, a guess the number of sweets in the jar and the weight of the cake stall, a bottle stall and a refreshments stall. All the drinks and home baked cakes on it were free. People began to arrive as we were setting up and some sales - especially of the preserves - took place even before we had officially begun. It was quite cold but we had a fun time and it was a good feeling to see the things we had grown and made ourselves from natural and upcycled materials being bought.

Passers-by stopped to have a look, to chat and to buy things. The decorations, baking and preserves were very popular and sold out quickly. There was a happy atmosphere and we were glad we had gone ahead. We heard later that we had raised more than £630 for Historylinks Extension Fund, and we felt very proud. We had worked hard over the months, but it had all been worth it.

Our decorations stall, with Ruby-Kay keeping an eye on the bottle stall, left



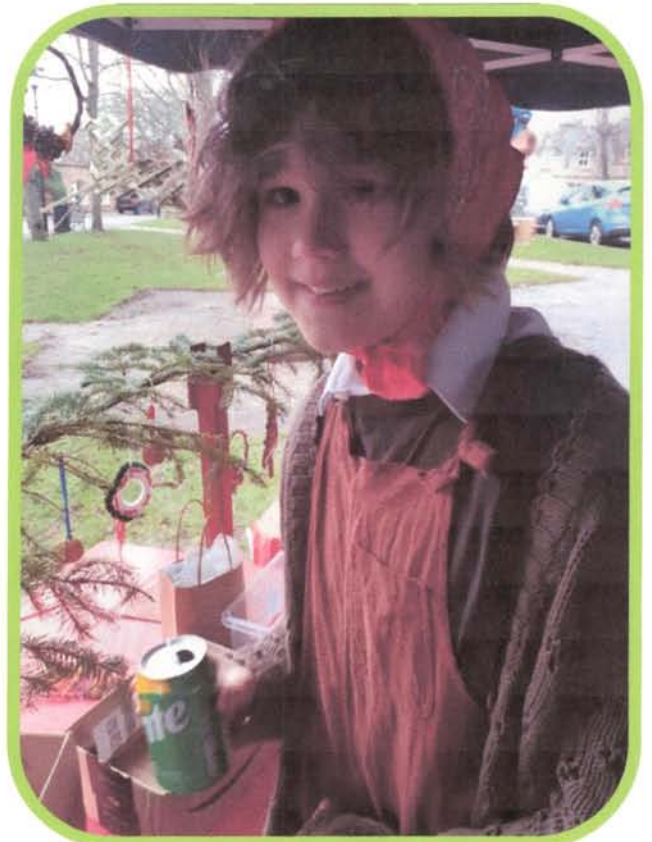


The preserves and crumbles stall



*Far left:
Daniel and
Mary Jane's
dad, Luke,
keep the
apple press in
action*

*Left: The free
refreshments
stall*



Jessica (left) and Ruby-Kay (right) taking some well-earned refreshments

Ruby-Kay and Jessica keeping an eye on the Decorations stall



A happy customer

Working on our project books

After the Christmas holidays we set to work completing our project record books. We had a lot to put in them and this was more difficult than we had expected as each week several of us could not attend, mostly because of Covid (and one week, snow) but we kept going.

Preparing the pages made us look back and think about all our activities; we remembered the fun we had had and how proud we were to be treating the environment respectfully: recycling, growing our own, sharing with the local community, learning about our heritage, and keeping old skills alive. We had been learning to value our environment and our heritage; to look after it as best we can, both for ourselves and for the generations to come.



Clockwise from front left: Mary Jane, Scarlett, Mary, Jessica, Ruby-Kay and Andrew, all hard at work



Running the gifts stall.

Top: Lynne



*Bottom: Lorna, and
Jessica's sister, Aine*



*Working on pages for
their project books*

above: Mary

below: Darcey



Working towards the display

As well as making our concertina books to record the project, we have used this room to create a display about our project. The wall was painted green and Trish added the birch trees on it for us. We helped to make the 3D tree, painting the branches and drawing then adding the leaves to its branches to turn it from winter into spring. Our project and folklore storybooks are here for you to look at and there are plenty of examples of the things we made. We hope you've enjoyed finding out about our project. On the table you will see the 'Young Curators' Challenge'. There is a puzzle to solve and a competition to enter. Please have a go, and have fun!



From left to right: Isla, Ruby-Kay Daniel, Mary Jane and Mary, all at work painting the tree branches

Many thanks go to the following for their help and support with our YCC project:

Trish Matthews, Sutherland Adult Learning Co-Ordinator (Literacies), High Life Highland

Sally Wild, Historylinks Volunteer

Mairi Macpherson, Highland Seedlings and Fearn Free Food Garden

Tim Palmer, Master Basket Weaver

Dave Mahoney, Historylinks Volunteer

Lynne Mahoney, Historylinks Curator

Peter and Sarah Milligan, Opspisdale House

Alison Davies, Historylinks Trustee

All helpers at the **1940s Christmas Fair**

All parents of YCC members

Our YCC Members:



Scarlett Levens



Andrew Diracles



Daniel Shepherd



Darcey Levens



Isla Swanson



Jessie Lewis



Jessica Foy



Layla Baikie



Leah Cameron



Maisie Levens



Mary Diracles



Mary Jane Currie



Ruby-Kay Mackay