



Pictured (left to right) are Rev Rory MacLeod, John Angus MacDonald and Lachie Gillies with the plaque which will be added to the Staffin War Memorial



The north Skye branch of the Royal British Legion parade the colours from the Staffin War Memorial

## Mystery of Beinn Edra pendant is solved

The mystery behind a piece of jewellery, which was found by a schoolboy among the wreckage of a warplane that crashed 70 years ago in Skye, has finally been solved.

Efforts are now underway to reunite the St Christopher pendant — inscribed with a woman's name — with the American family of the man who was killed when his aircraft crashed into Beinn Edra in Staffin. Tormod MacLeod, from Clachan in Staffin, found the pendant — which bears the inscription 'Love from Eda' — at the crash site around 20 years ago.

The B-17 Flying Fortress crashed in fog on the 3rd of March 1945. The Staffin community held a commemoration at the weekend, and the names of the nine-man crew are to be added to the local war memorial.

After he found the pendant Tormod and his parents made several attempts to trace the wearer's family but with no success. They then asked aviation archaeologist Dr Terence

Christian before last Saturday's commemoration event if he could shed any light on the mystery.

Dr Christian confirmed that Eda was the wife of gunner George S Aldrich and it was he who had worn the pendant before the crash. The



The inscription reads "Love From Eda"

couple had only been married 10 months when he left America for the last time.

Sadly, Eda died in 1999. But Dr Christian, of Glasgow University, has now offered to contact the next of kin to inform them of the discovery and hopefully return the medal.

"The silver St Christopher's medal, with 'Love From Eda' engraved on the reverse, was likely the last gift Mrs Eda Aldrich gave to her new husband Cpl George Aldrich before he departed for the war in Europe," said Dr Christian.

St Christopher is the patron saint of travellers and it was likely a good luck present for her husband.

Dr Christian said: "The medal's connection, which was uncovered by our archaeological research collaboration with the Staffin community, reminds us that wreck sites are not historically inert; they still have very personal stories to tell which connect us to the love and losses of the past."

Tormod, who is now 29 and lives in Inverness, said he would be delighted to return the medal to the

family in America.

"We were primary school age and just exploring Beinn Edra," he said. "We were about 10 metres from the overhang to the gully and I found it after digging around a stone. I think we had in our head we would look for machine guns. We tried at the

time to return it to the family but nothing came back."

At the commemoration Dr Christian told the audience that the crew would have known of their fate about five seconds before the impact. "As an American myself, the community's devotion to

remembering the airmen as individuals is especially touching," he said. "The commemoration events for the Beinn Edra B-17 crash are a credit to the Staffin community's longstanding concern for the continuation of the American aircrew's memory."

## Staffin community gather to remember 70 years on

The plane crash which claimed the lives of nine American servicemen shortly before the end of World War II was commemorated in Staffin last Saturday.

The B-17 Flying Fortress crashed into the hillside at Beinn Edra on the 3rd of March 1945. Seventy years later, some 70 people gathered in Staffin to remember the tragic events.

Former Commando chaplain and

newly-installed Broadford Church of Scotland minister Rory MacLeod presided over the commemoration, assisted by Rev John Murray.

John Angus MacDonald, formerly of Glaspein but now living in Kirkhill, unveiled a new plaque bearing the names of the nine crew members who lost their lives. John Angus was a young lad rabbiting near Beinn Edra when the crash occurred, although he was too young to join the many locals involved in the rescue and salvage attempts.

Lachie Gillies — who remembers seeing the plane flying overhead just before it crashed — said a Gaelic prayer, while members of the Royal British Legion paraded the colours. Teenagers Eoghann Beaton from Kilmuir and Anna Nicolson, Flodigarry, provided music on the pipes and clarsach respectively.

Staffin Community Council and Staffin Trust would like to thank Columba 1400 for hosting the event, and to everybody else who helped make it possible.

## Parents and council clash over zoning of north Skye schools

BY MICHAEL RUSSELL  
michael.russell@whfp.co.uk

Highland Council have proposed only a temporary "dual zoning" to cover three closure-threatened primary schools in north Skye, it emerged this week.

At last week's ward forum meeting in Portree area education manager Norma Young said that in seeking to close schools at Edinbane, Knockbreck and Struan, the council would offer parents the option of sending their children to Carbost or MacDiarmid. The closure plan also includes the construction of a new 100-pupil school at Dunvegan.

However, Ms Young made no mention of the fact that, according to a letter received by parents at the end of last week, the "dual zoning" option might only be available to children who are currently enrolled

at the schools, and their siblings, at the times the schools are closed.

Edinbane parent Frances Maclean said that, as well as committing council officials to "consider further" this limited option, the letter also said that the council would "combine the existing school catchment areas of Edinbane, Knockbreck and Struan".

She added: "This shows you what a mess the council is in as these two points are totally contradictory."

The dual zoning proposal is in fact a "private arrangement", said Ms Maclean.

She added: "It does not address the long-term issue of Edinbane perhaps being forced into the wrong catchment. Nor does it reflect the discussion that took place at the ECAS Committee meeting on 14th January, where Councillor Drew Miller made clear that he could not support the proposal unless the issue of catchments was resolved. We

consider it an abuse of procedure to push through a recommendation for school closures without resolving this fundamental issue first."

When the prospect of dual zoning for the north Skye schools was raised at the January meeting Caithness councillor Bill Fernie objected as this had not been granted during a similar rationalisation of schools in Wick during 2011.

"The council have had a policy for years not to have dual zoning because it is incredibly financially inefficient as you need things like transport going two ways," added Ms Maclean.

In a letter to care and learning director Bill Alexander, she states: "The straight amalgamation of the four catchment zones is integral to the north west Skye proposal. Any alteration to the catchment zone impacts substantially on the whole proposal. The Educational Benefits

Statement, for example, relies on pupil numbers being sufficient for a minimum of three classes. If Edinbane and part of Struan catchments are re-zoned, it is highly likely that three classes would not be achieved in the new school, and the EBS would no longer stand."

At last week's ward forum meeting Ms Young also said there was space at MacDiarmid primary school for pupils from Edinbane and Knockbreck. However, Ms Maclean wrote: "We question, therefore, why Caledonian Economics' 'Options Appraisal' rejected a merger of Edinbane and MacDiarmid (Option J) on grounds that MacDiarmid had insufficient capacity. If those grounds were incorrect, then Option J should be re-visited."

The closure of the three-schools and the dual zoning proposal is due to be considered at a full council meeting today (Thursday).

## New director to oversee castle grounds revamp

A new "transition director" has been appointed to the Stornoway Trust to oversee the £5.5 million regeneration of the Castle Grounds and to assist in a strategic change within the organisation.

The appointment of Annetta MacLeod, a consultant in the oil and gas industry, follows the successful award of a Heritage Lottery Fund grant to revitalise the popular wooded area of the town. Ms MacLeod will advise on the most effective organisational framework and staffing issues.

Trust chairman Murdo Murray said: "We are delighted to welcome Annetta to the Stornoway Trust team. Annetta is an experienced consultant of island background. She has extensive experience in strategy development, and organisational and process improvement. She is currently

working as a senior consultant in the oil and gas industry. This is a crucial role as we seek to implement the findings of our recently-completed organisational review."

He added: "We have recently submitted our Lews Castle Grounds Regeneration Project Round 2 bid to HLF in partnership with Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, with a decision expected in June 2015. The total project is approximately £5.5 million and will restore important historic features, including the formal gardens, improve access, enhance management and maintenance and provide new facilities that will enable even more people to enjoy this outstanding public park."

"It also includes provision for four key posts to manage and maintain a park of this importance and co-ordinate a range of activities for the benefit of present and future generations."