

Winter
2020

North Ronaldsay Newsletter



The Blue Door

30 March - 4 April 2020.

The NR Trust is in the Blue Door charity shop in Kirkwall

Please leave your donated items in the Pier Store on North Ronaldsay by Thursday 19th March. Many thanks to Pier Master, Stewart Swanney for letting us do that.

If anyone is interested in volunteering with a session (morning or afternoon) please speak to a member of the Trust.

The Blue Door staff suggests that we donate the following:

- Good condition, clean clothes
- Good quality items
- Functional household goods
- Electrical goods (they PAT test)
- Wool
- Books (but not loads)
- Home bakes, fudge, jam etc
- Not VHS video tapes 

If you shop with Amazon, a simple way to help support the North Ronaldsay Trust is to sign up at:

<https://smile.amazon.co.uk/ch/SC030545>

Amazon will donate 0.5% of your purchase to the Trust.



Congratulations to Mary and Stewart Swanney of Kirbist. The photo shows Stewart with his two lovely granddaughters, Lily and Sadie.

Sadie was born on Tuesday 23rd July 2019. Sadie is the second child of Mary and Stewart's daughter Ruth and her husband Ben.

Community Coffee Morning

11am on Saturday 1st February
at the Community Centre

- Discussion about the NHS meeting on 13th Feb at 1 pm
- Maritime Heritage Project
- Blue Door
- Heather - Oceans of Value Project

Free Tea & Coffee - Home bakes welcome!

North Ronaldsay Trust News

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

John Scott

As we approach the Trust's 20th anniversary, it is worth looking back and recognising our achievements. Over the years there have been over forty people on the Board and a significant number of others who have volunteered, made donations and helped in a number of other ways. The number of Trust supporters is quite remarkable given the small population of North Ronaldsay.

Going into a new decade, although we continue to face various challenges; there are a number of positives, including new islanders adding to the community, more inhabited houses and an increasingly positive external view of North Ronaldsay.

The need for fund raising continues to be a priority and we aim to make the most of opportunities such as the Blue Door event at the end of March, see more details in this Newsletter. The 'Friends of NRT' was successful in raising funds; it would be good to revive this type of group. Please email any fundraising ideas or suggestions to - admin@northronaldsaytrust.com.

To qualify for grant funding from Scottish Land Fund, we are required to update our constitutional documents and to have a membership which more accurately reflects the North Ronaldsay Community. Membership was discussed at the last AGM and also at a recent island coffee morning. We have taken on board members' views and we are currently working on amending the current constitutional documents, which shall then be put to the members for approval.

Thanks to all for your continued support.

ISLAND CONFERENCE AND SCHOOLHOUSE OPENING

Helga Scott, CDM, The Old Manse

On Monday 17th June, North Ronaldsay played host to an island conference, followed by the official opening of the Schoolhouse by Liam McArthur (cutting the ribbon with shears) and a few words from Norman Walsh from Firefly Energi, the contractors for the project.

Working within available time slots for ad hoc flights, a packed programme saw individuals from the island as well as representatives from a range of organisations, give presentations on key issues affecting the island, such as housing, jobs and marketing. The conference kicked off with a wonderful reading of Willie Viggie's 'Island Song' by four of the younger members of the community Teigan Scott, Chloe Wood, Lilly Gray and Zander Scott, and was then formally opened by North Ronaldsay's Laird, Caroline Tindall. Organisations represented included Visit Scotland, Destination Orkney, Orkney Island Council, Orkney Food and Drink, the Orkney Sheep Foundation and Rural Housing Scotland. Wendy Barrie, Food Writer and Chef was also in attendance and gave a very informative presentation on North Ronaldsay mutton becoming the first Slow Food Presidium in Scotland and potential ways to develop the market for it. The event saw an excellent turn out of the community and was followed

by a buffet lunch which gave folk the chance to ask questions and discuss the morning's presentations.

Thank you to everyone who attended and to all those who helped set up and with the running of the event; to North Ronaldsay Bird Observatory, the Lighthouse Café and Mark Holbrook for providing the delicious buffet lunch; and to Loganair for getting everyone to and from the island (with the added challenge of fog). Thank you also to Radio Orkney, Orkney.com and The Orcadian for covering the event, and Start Point New Media for the use of photographs from the event. Also, a big thank you to all the funders for the Schoolhouse project; OIC, Rural and Island's Housing Fund and Princes Countryside Fund.



Lily Gray, Zander Scott, Teigan Scott and Lily Gray

Welcome to the Winter 2020 NR Trust Newsletter, a look back at 2019 and a look forward to 2020. It's been a pleasure to compile the contributions of at least 20 people, a proper community production! The plan is to have quarterly newsletters, so I am sorry if anyone has been missed a chance to write an article, but you can submit a piece, picture, quiz etc for the next issue to alexandrawright70@gmail.com or write it by hand and I'll type it out.

NEWS FROM OUR SHEEP DYKE WARDEN

Sian Tarrant, The Schoolhouse

In my first week Alison took me out to look at the dyke; pointing out bits on the dyke to look out for, the dos and don'ts of dyke building and small repairs that I could get started on to get my eye in. We started with a repair by the cattle grid at Nouster which went well. Since then I have been doing other small repairs and rebuilding small sections, including a piece near Westness which came down recently during Storm Brendan. This gap attracted two sheep who got stuck between the dyke and the fence behind it before I built a temporary barrier while the rebuilding took place. I have been out checking the whole dyke, divided into 3 areas (North, South East and South West), fortnightly.

With the BBC news articles in December and the New Year came a lot of media attention, radio interviews and messages from the public. Keen to strike while the iron's hot, I have set up social media accounts and a



www.woollygreenjumper.com

website linked to my role as Sheep Dyke Warden. I've been writing a blog every Sunday and sharing photos from island life and my work, and had a great reception so far. People have been very keen to offer their time volunteering to help rebuild the dyke. I already have 2 volunteer groups lined up later in the year and 2 students wanting to do their placements/work experience with me.



Before and after dyke repair, Garso Wick



REPORT FROM THE ISLAND GAMES

Mark Holbrook

At the Island Games in Gibraltar there was Graham Scott's son Zander (Alexander), competing in the athletics, Michael Scott as manager of the squash team, Craig Smith's (Dennishill) daughter, and myself.

The sailing used Laser dinghies which are also an Olympic sailing class. The sailing was hosted by the Royal Gibraltar Yacht Club with the facilities including a well stocked bar to wash the salt away! There were two races every day and even two practice races on the day before. The racing was done not far from the westerly end of the runway and whilst the sun was out there was plenty of wind on all days, however the last two days were the best as the winds became easterly which flattened the sea. It was a honour to be asked to represent Orkney at the games.

Island Infrastructure

IMPROVEMENTS TO THE WATER SYSTEM

Chris Wright, Amey

Amey, working on behalf of Scottish Water is subcontracting the improvement works to BDS Plant Hire.

Work starts on the 3rd February to lay 1700 metres of water mains in order to pump water from the water treatment plant (at Ancum Loch) to the tank (behind the Old Kirk). The existing pipe will be used for distribution only.

There will be some road closures, but the dates for these have yet to be confirmed. Hopefully, the Island Residents WhatsApp group will be used to keep you informed.

An earlier geophysical survey revealed that there may be features of interest by the cemetery, so there will be a “soil strip” so an archaeologist can do a more extensive survey.

In addition to the pipe work, there will be a booster installed to maintain adequate water pressure.

CLOUDNET

Mark Holbrook

It must have been late 2018 that Greg Whitton of CloudNet originally came to a community coffee morning to discuss the possibility of installing a network to deliver a 10Mbps digital network, this being over 20 times faster than the BT network. There were few options about where to fix the receiver of the signal, but the Schoolhouse was finally chosen. However as the Schoolhouse had to be rendered first, the installation had to wait. Finally in August 2019 the installation started.

It is not known if the faster speed reduced the time online because it was faster, or actually increased the time online as it wasn't painful anymore to browse on a slow connections.

There are now 30 connections on the island, albeit that eight of these connections are actually directly from Sandy.

CloudNet are planning to upgrade the network to the Northern Isles due the growth in demand. There should be no outages as they are just increasing the number of transmitters, rather than replacing them. This work should be completed by the middle of February

LIGHTHOUSE NEWS

Mark Holbrook

At the beginning of the year I visited the Operations centre at Trinity House in Harwich. Trinity House is the English equivalent of the Northern Lighthouse Board. Whilst they monitor their own light ships and lighthouses, they also monitor the lighthouses of the Commissioners of Irish Lights and the Northern Lighthouse Board.

The Trust has increased the number of tour guides from three to seven. Training was delivered by the Northern Lighthouse Board on the safe operation of the light when delivering tours to all guides. The increase in the number of guides is to ensure that there is always cover for tours to be delivered.



Mark at Trinity House

Farewell to Ronaldsay

News about people who have moved away

A MESSAGE FROM SUZANNE WISE

Formerly of Cavan

It is hard to believe that it is just over 12 months since we left Cavan; it was not an easy decision to make and was quite a wrench.

We had to move due to ill health, but now, thankfully, life is slowly improving. I am volunteering as the Club Secretary for our local Catrine Amateur Football Club and on good days Stephen helps out with the ground maintenance.

We will always be grateful to Mark and Bernie for their help and assistance in selling Cavan to Louise and Neil; if it wasn't for Mark's hard work the sale would probably not have gone through.

If it wasn't for Stephen's health we would still be living in Cavan and on North Ronaldsay; we had a wonderful 6 years and 8 months and met some wonderful people.

JOHN O' WESTNESS



20th September 2019, John leaving for Kirkwall

In September, John Swanney (Westness), islander and familiar face to locals and visitors alike, left his island home to start a new life in Kirkwall. Unfortunately, upon the passing of his sister, Helen, no suitable housing was available in North Ronaldsay.

Thankfully, John secured a home in central Kirkwall and is adapting well to his new way of life. John says he enjoys bumping into North Ronaldsay folk when he's out and about but misses living close to the sea.



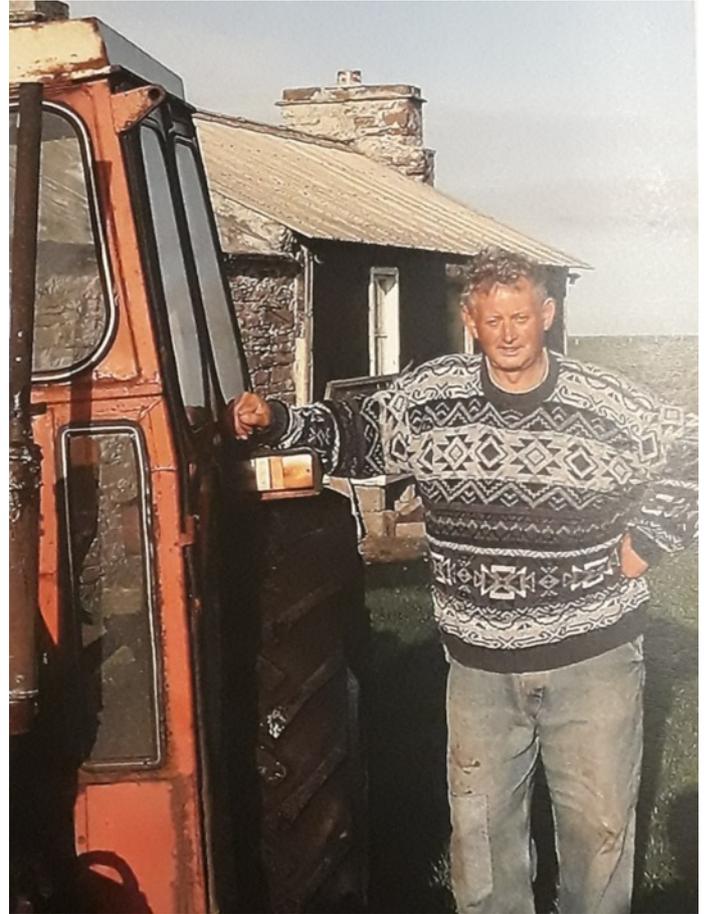
John, Tommy Muir and Prince Charles, 1993



SIMON DAVIS

Simon left his position as assistant bird warden at the Bird Observatory after 4 years in total, 2013 and 2017-19. He will soon begin training as a guide on cruises to Antarctica.

In Memory of North Ronaldsay folk who have passed away



BERTIE THOMSON

Shiela Deyell - Vincoin

The funeral of the late Bertie Thomson, who passed away aged 86 on the 28th of November, was held in North Ronaldsay on the 4th of December 2019. Bertie lived most of his life on the island where he worked and brought up a family with his wife Alice. Unfortunately, Bertie moved to Kirkwall three years ago due to ill health. However, his interest in and determination to return never wavered which shows the genuine passion and love he had for the Island he called home.

ROGNVALD SEATTER

George Seatter, Phisligar

Rognvald John Seatter died on the 7th January this year. He was buried on the 10th January in Saint Olaf's Cemetery in Kirkwall. He was named after his uncles' house where he was born in Finstown in 1947. He lived at Howar and attended the primary school in North Ronaldsay. In 1957, when Rognvald was 10, his family moved to Winwick in South Ronaldsay.

Rognvald joined the Merchant Navy and went as far as Australia where he met up with relatives. He suffered an injury which resulted in him being partially sighted. He made creels in the 70s and 1980s which he sold to fishermen in North Ronaldsay and all over Orkney. He had many friends who were welcomed as frequent visitors.

HELEN SWANNEY

Winnie Scott, North Manse

Helen Jane Swanney died on the 16th April 2019 and was buried on North Ronaldsay. She was born at Westness, the oldest of three children, her brothers being Tommy and John.

Helen was a good dyke builder, but she was good at everything she did, be it her knitting, which was flat and even or cooking, she prepared lovely meals for the people who came to stay at Treb. Having moved to Treb, her husband Ronnie's place, Helen worked in the shop and kept it very well stocked. Helen also worked as airport manager for many years.

Well read, knowledgeable and with an excellent and reliable memory, she was a great source of information on a variety of subjects including birds, plants, ship wrecks and island history. Helen joined in island social life and until her move to St Peter's House in Stromness, she attended church, luncheon club, events and film club. She was a beautiful singer and she used to visit me for Hogmanay.



Helen at a Harvest Home



Helen in the shop at Treb, 2010

News from the Clubs

ASTRONOMY GROUP

Alex Wright, Breckan

We had a sad end to year as Professor John Brown, the Astronomer Royal and friend to our group sadly passed away. He and his wife Margaret came to visit in September and John gave an interesting talk entitled “Stargazing – From Scottish Dark Skies to the Edge of the Universe”. He kindly donated a dedicated copy of his book for us to use as a prize for the best photograph in our Dark Skies Calendar.

The calendar has been well received, with 18 people contributing to its creation. It was printed, by the infinitely patient Robert at Herald Print Shop in Kirkwall, who ended up producing 155 copies. We raised £250, which will be used for the Science Weekend.

The Science Weekend will be held on the 7th and 8th of March. With the help of Howie Firth, we have been awarded £500 from British Science Week and £1000 from the National Lottery 25 Year Anniversary Fund. We will invite astronomers to give a talk and we hope that people from other islands will be able to join us for this weekend. The winner of the best calendar picture, as chosen by photographer and film maker, Raymond Besant, will be announced on this weekend.



Photo by Derek Jackson of some of the members of North Ronaldsay Astronomy Group at the standing stone with John Brown.

Isabella, Lottie, Helga, John, Jack, Anne, Alex, Carla, John Brown, Alison and Kevin

FILM CLUB

Sarah Moore, The Meedoo

The first film of 2020 brought with it a beautiful message about living life to the fullest, which really should be a part of every year's New Year's Resolution. In Last Holiday, Queen Latifah's character, a shy and restrained shop assistant spends her days longing for her 'book of possibilities' to come true. Then one unfortunate day, she finds she has several brain tumours and has only weeks to live. She cashes in every penny to her name, throws the inhibitions in the gutter where they belong and lives it up in a posh hotel in the Czech Republic. Quickly working through her book of possibilities and inspiring everyone she meets with her confidence, kindness and care-free optimism, she is urged to return home to spend her remaining time with the ones she loves. The film ends with the love of her life walking through the door of her hotel, having travelled around the world to find her, eager to spend whatever time they had together, be it 5 minutes or 50 years. By this point it is getting quite emotional, you can't help but love this character and for her to have achieved so much, it was only fair for the fairy-tale ending - she was misdiagnosed and went on to get everything she ever wanted. Happily ever after.

Wouldn't it be great though, if we all had the courage to live everyday as if we were going to die tomorrow? Imagine how many things in our book of possibilities we could tick off. What would be in those books in the first place?

So I leave you all with this thought for 2020: let go of everything holding you back and enjoy everyday as if it were your last - someday it will be - let us have lived a full life when that day comes.

BOOK CLUB

Anne Ogilvie - Cursiter

The book club enjoyed a rise in numbers in 2019, we currently have a membership of 10. More members are very welcome. We meet at the Community Centre, usually on a Friday to accommodate weekenders. Books read in 2019 include The Snowman, a Scandi thriller, Lights, a story about an eighteenth century lighthouse, The Girl with the Pearl Earring, the most popular book of the year and Purple Hibiscus, a story set in Nigeria, which made for much discussion. The last book of the year was Dreams from my Father, a memoir by Barack Obama. It proved to be not so well received! So if you enjoy reading do come along.

The next meeting is proposed for the 7th Feb.

FIT CLUB & DANCE CLUBS

Sarah Moore , The Meedoo

Right, a peedie bit of an update on fit club: well there hasnae been much of a fit club this winter - for me at least. Over the Christmas and New Year I took stock of the fact that I have to have eaten my body weight in biscuits and there's no sign of any let up as yet, I sent a message on the WhatsApp that 2020 will be the year for fitness (hoping to inspire everyone, myself included). Of course, I failed to mention just how far into 2020 that fitness idea would take effect (my attendance has been better but not blindingly good).



Anne O on the treadmill and our new rowing machine

Anyway, I also felt that we needed a bit more fun in our lives as fit club members did seem to be lacking in enthusiasm. So I suggested we take up dancing. Cue another WhatsApp group and away we went. The first session and the beginning of the second we all looked like broken toys just moving around stunted in the same place. A few YouTube videos later and we found the Holy Grail of dance instructors - How to Waltz in 35 minutes; if only we'd found that an hour ago! We started that Saturday morning at 11am doing the one-legged drunken walk on the spot to actually waltzing around the room at 12:30. Doesn't time fly when you're having fun eh? Anyone looking in the door might have thought we knew what we were doing, of course they might have wondered why 5 women were all dancing with ghosts (hint we need men at dance club). Roll on the next session - we're attempting a class every Saturday morning at 11am but it can be altered around the steamer. If you want to get involved, please just turn up to a session at the community centre, we can add you into the WhatsApp group and whatever video we've been working on that day will be put on the group for folk to practice at home if they can't make every session. Fit club as it stands at the moment is still Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 11am.

SINGING CLUB

Jack Straw, Breckan

Stephen Sondhiem once said : " If I cannot fly, then let me sing," of course us lucky North Ronaldsay islanders can do both. We take to the air regularly on the peedie plane and since last spring we have sung together at the community centre on a Thursday evening between 7 :30 and 9 p.m. The singing club is a chance to have fun and sing, we sing all sorts of songs, popular, traditional and simply whatever folk feel like singing. We don't sing to perform, we sing for the enjoyment. In the weeks leading up to Yule we sang a good many carols. You never know, one day we may try flying and singing at the same time - the pilots do after all have the protection of their headphones! All new singers are very welcome.



The newly-tuned piano where Ann of Purtabreck plays lively songs such as The Queen's Maries, The Rose of Allendale, The Wild Mountain Thyme, Flodgarry and Dumbarton's Drums.

Book Club

Friday 7th Feb, 8pm

Church

Friday 21st Feb, 7:30pm with Valerie Pomfret

RBS Bank Wife

First Monday of the month, between first and middle plane

Science Weekend

7th & 8th March

Panto

Saturday 11th April

Bikes

BIKE REPAIR

Louis Craigie, Loch End

In February 2019 myself and Alex started our first session of bicycle maintenance training. Mark from Cycle Orkney taught us the basics of bicycle assembly as well as bicycle maintenance over the course of 3 separate sessions. We learned everything from fixing a bicycle puncture to fitting a new chain and changing a wheel to brake and gear cable fitting and adjustments.

We completed our training when Mark came out to the Island at the end of April to help and supervise us when we assembled the 8 new adult sized bicycles which were bought by the North Ronaldsay Trust. Since then me and Alex have been using the skills we learned for repairing several of the smaller bicycles during a time when just about every bicycle was needed to be out on hire! Next we plan to service the bicycles to be ready for this year's upcoming season.



BIKE HIRE

Alex Wright, Breckan

It's been a great year for the bike hire. Everyone enjoyed the new bikes, which Mark funded through Cycle Scotland and bought from Orkney Cycle. They have comfortable seats and a step-through design so are more suitable for our lovely, peaceful and smooth roads. We made a record breaking £2000 as the new bikes needed little repair, were attractive to potential hires and the scheme was run on a voluntary basis.

A welcome addition to the bike hire kit is a bike rack that sits on a car tow bar and holds 4 bikes. Many thanks to Mark Holbrook for finding the funding for all our new kit.

We had a "celebratory cyclist" as Hillary Benn and his wife were out last August.



Louis, Olly, Jack and I have been doing the annual service on the bikes. Generally they are doing well, although their handlebars are susceptible to rust so we have been painting them with rust eater and Hammerite paint.

As the bike hire is run by volunteers, it is as "self-service" as possible. People wanting to rent can either email at bikehire@northronaldsay.co.uk or text me on 07809770082, or they can just pick up a bike from one of the 3 bike stores and send me a text. The bikes are kept indoors at the airport, Bird Obs and the Lighthouse. Hire is £10 per day.

28th January: all 8 bikes and the first bike hirer of the year. Anne Bignall, NILPS, is out looking for otters, any sightings please email Anne.Bignall@orkney.gov.uk

Competition

WHERE ARE THESE OBJECTS FOUND ON NORTH RONALDSAY?



Answers to alexandrawright70@gmail.com or speak to Alex or Jack. There is no prize beyond the pride in seeing your name in print. If anyone would like to make a puzzle or quiz of any sort for the next issue, that would be much appreciated.

Pantomime

HANSEL AND GRETEL, 2019 PANTOMIME

Sid Ogilvie, Cursiter

Last year's pantomime, performed on the 20th of April, was the traditional fairy tale of Hansel and Gretel.

We more or less stayed with the original story that has amused young children for generations with the ingredients of abusive parents, kidnap, forced labour, murder and cannibalism. To which we added a plot by the local witches to pretend to be council workers on a mission to save children from obesity when the real objective was to find a fat boy for the coven's Halloween supper. Hansel and Gretel rescued the intended victim and in the process managed to wipe out the whole coven of witches. The wicked stepmother was hugely grateful for the rescue of her son and vowed to be kinder to all the children.

And of course they all lived happily ever after.

Hansel and Gretel



A Pantomime
written by
Sid Ogilvie

20th April 2019

PINOCCHIO, 2020 PANTOMIME

Saturday April 10th

To take part or help please talk to the director Alison



SHEEP TALES AND OTHER YARNS..... MEET THE MAKER: WOOLLY WALLY

Hello, I'm Helen G otherwise known as Woolly Wally and I've been creating my little sheepy characters here on North Ronaldsay for the past 8 years.

My main craft interest is Needle felting, which has become hugely popular in the last few years. Did you know- unlike other crafts it came about from a regression in an industrial process? While hand spinning is "tradition" and machine spinning is modern, Needle felting machines came before the craft of hand needle felting! (Of course there had ALWAYS been wet felting but that is a different craft entirely- trust me ask a wet felter!)

I started out making small things, as most hobby crafters do, but in recent years I've been more interested in larger arty one of a kind ("ewe"-nique pieces, if you will) from three dimensional sheep (and other animals) wall hangings, to hand woven and dyed shawls and cushion covers.



So what can I tell you about Woolly Wally? Well I came up with the sheep character and his name over 20 years ago (so well before the birth of Shaun the Sheep!) while working part time on a smallholding in North Wales. The Prince's Youth Business Trust helped me get started with getting my enterprise off the ground - printed T-shirts with my cartoon sheep on the front, and accessories made from toy fabric- sheep purses, pencil cases, bags, key rings.- all sewn on my second hand sewing machine.

Then full time work took over and Woolly Wally was put to one side. It was a decade later - when my pet sheep (born on that smallholding and the inspiration for my cheeky sheep) died and a work colleague, trying to cheer me up, gave me an abandoned needle felt kit - it was a part-made doll's head, with wool and needles. I had never heard of needle felting but thanks to the internet I soon found out how it came about (fairly recently back then) and what people were doing with it.

So Woolly Wally mark II was born. I hated dolls so that was binned and I set about making wee sheep out of the remaining wool. And it was great fun (although, that saying - made with blood sweat and tears was all too literal in the early days!).

I was soon on the look out for wool to needle felt - and so the idea of using only wool from rare British breeds of sheep came about. Despite many of my contemporaries using Merino for its soft qualities - you will never find Merino in my wool stash!

WW started off as a Herdwick sheep as that was readily available to me. But since discovering the North Ronaldsay sheep and moving up here I have almost exclusively made my products from North Ronaldsay fleece. I also support a few farm animal sanctuaries and buy fleeces from their residents (who could be any breed but most likely a cross breed).

Because I work in the North Ronaldsay Wool Mill, I see all the processes the fleece goes through to get to knitting yarn. Many of these processes result in by products that are not suitable for knitting yarn but turn out to be great for needle felting! Lucky me! Of course if anyone reading this has a use for sheep hair (extracted from the fleece to leave softer wool fibres for yarn making) then do get in touch with the Yarn Company - I'm talking to you upholsterers and stuffers!

So as well as supporting rare breed conservation (See RBST website) I am trying to do my bit for the environment by using by-products where appropriate in my business - which also helps make the use of the rare sheep's entire fleeces so being less wasteful, and making a limited quantity item go further.



Latterly I have been lucky enough to get the use of hand looms and am now hand weaving North Ronaldsay wool on my vintage 4 shaft floor loom. Again, where possible, I use by-products i.e. the end-of-line remnant yarns that we get at the end of the mill's plying process. Using these yarns results in one-off colourways so if you buy a product made from it you can guarantee no-one else will ever have one like yours!

My hand woven fabric is made into scarves, small lap throws, ruanas (shepherds shawls) and cushion covers with matching lampshades. Those who have been to the Sheep Festival before and enjoyed the local gins (you know who you are...) have contributed greatly to this venture as I am now giving a second life to the (vast quantity of- ahem) empty gin bottles!!

You can find my 3D needle felted wall hangings and models, and hand woven textiles over on my Facebook page: Woolly-wally. A website (woollywally.com) will be regenerated this coming year too.

Email enquiries, including workshop availability, and commissions to woollywally@gmail.com

Thank ewe all who have supported North Ronaldsay Sheep, and Woolly Wally, and hope to see some of you at my woolly workshops during the Sheep Fest!

Nature Report

George Gay, Bird Observatory

My highlights of 2019 are the Siberian Rubythroat, Sperm Whale, Mourning Dove, Savi's Warbler and the Crossbill influx.



Crossbill, July



*Hornemann's Arctic Redpoll
September*



Merlin, April



*Short Eared Owl
November*



*Snow bunting
April*



*White Tailed Eagle
March*



*Whooper Swan
March*

George provided us with a detailed write up of this year's sightings, which is too large for this newsletter but can be emailed on request from alexandrawright70@gmail.com

New Islanders

LOUISE, NEIL AND LIAM, NEW RESIDENTS AT CAVEN

Louise Paterson

Neil and I met in 2004 on Mull having moved there within a few years of each other. I was running a small hotel and restaurant and Neil was the handyman, gardener! I think we were both a bit surprised to find each other really, we were certainly no spring chickens and weren't looking

We sold the hotel and bought a small cottage that hadn't been lived in for twenty years and set about renovating. It wasn't four walls and a roof really because the tin roof was rusted away! Thank god Neil knew what he was doing! I started working as a private chef travelling all over Scotland in shooting lodges. Neil was busy building new houses and keeping the holiday cottages on the island in tip top shape as well as continuing our renovation. Once we had the house nearly there we decided that we could offer a child a home and we applied to become foster parents. We thought the process would take a year but just a few months later, Liam arrived and we didn't even have a kitchen! Poor Liam had a dreadful start in life, he was orphaned at two with his parents dying seven weeks apart. He went on to suffer terrible neglect so when he arrived, he was a poor wee soul at the age of 5 1/2.

Mull was just what he needed to thrive, there were only 8 in the school and he loved to learn. We adopted him officially when he was 11 and got married at the same time, all very stressful because we had to go to the mainland for the adoption and it was touch and go that we would get back to Mull for the wedding and naming ceremony the next day! Good old wind and ferries! We made it although most of the crockery on the ferry didn't.

I gave up private cheffing so that I could be home for Liam whilst he navigated teenagehood and exams. We decided to renovate our outbuildings and turn them into a bakery. Neil built the bake house single handed and having got it going we renovated our byre into a shop. The bakery turned out to be very popular and Neil ended up having to work with me to keep up. Around this time we rescued our big dog Diva from a kill shelter in a Bosnia. Used all over the world to keep livestock safe from predators of land and sky and also for conservation like the Namibia project and the fairy penguins in Australia, we couldn't let her die.



Diva

Liam had done so well at school that he had taken his advanced highers a year early but was only just sixteen and too young to go to university and then sadly we lost Neil's mum to dementia in January. We had come to a fork in the road so we took it!

Moving from island to island was....interesting....four ferries, bad weather, two large dogs, a cat and a parrot made for a fun journey! Mark was a total legend throughout and especially when we got stuck in Kirkwall and we will never be able to thank The Kirkwall Hotel enough for allowing us and the menagerie to stay for two nights, they didn't even bat an eyelid when we bought the 58kg dog in.

It has been an amazing few weeks, everyone has been so friendly and helping us from moving our stuff, to lending ladders, fuel cans, pick axes and knowledge and friendship! George S you have been a welcome godsend! Liam is loving his new independence and rock star way of getting to school! The daffodils of Cavan are pushing their way up which is a joy and a promise of spring.



George

MOVING TO NORTH RONALDSAY

Olly Gibb, The Schoolhouse

In early November we completed the journey from South England to North Ronaldsay and were welcomed by harsh



winds and kind faces. We arrived with only half our belongings after 4 ferry journeys, 3 days driving and were 2 very tired people with 1 little sea sick cat. We were very relieved to complete the journey and get our feet onto solid ground. A kind welcome party introduced themselves and we desperately tried to understand the new accent and translate strange words like 'ken' and 'peedie' and remember some names. The warm welcome was much appreciated and happily repeated with many more folk over the weeks that have followed.

Mark kindly showed us to The Schoolhouse and he and Alex helped us move in, using Colin's van. This really reflected the next month of people helping us and lending to us. We've been lent spades, bikes, trailers, bins and a cattle float. We've been given firewood, homemade chocolates, cake, whisky, rum (too much by Winnie!) and loads of lifts by kind drivers when our

mighty sack-barrow hasn't been able to handle the shopping. Thanks to all who have helped us settle in and feel part of the community. It's been great to get involved in the clubs and get to learn more about the island.

We're really enjoying the pace of life here and slowly but surely getting used to cycling in the 50 mile per hour winds that January has brought to North Ronaldsay. Sian's been busy on the dyke and I've got a few part time jobs that I fly to the Mainland for (weather permitting!). We're looking forward to some swimming, gardening and getting to see the lighter side of the island in the spring.

A WINTER TALE

Sue Taylor

Could I survive an Orkney winter, let alone a North Ronaldsay one? Moving from south-west England to a tiny windswept far-northern isle in October for 6 months felt like jumping in at the deep end, but I was curious to find out. Moving to Orkney was a long-held fantasy, as it remains for so many. Every summer for five years I'd been lured up to the islands by that vast sense of space, 180° skies, and the never-ending drama of colour and light wrought by an extraordinary fusion of earth, sky and water. (We don't get a lot of that in Bristol.)

I decided life was short, and I'd done enough dreaming. A year of planning, organising and de-cluttering later, I finally made the leap, and in October 2018 moved up and into Verracott, said to be the oldest habitable building on North Ronaldsay.



I had a great winter. People warn you - if you can survive an Orkney winter, you'll be ok, and so I'd been expecting ferocious and scary things. It really wasn't that bad - bit of a challenging wind sometimes, a whole heap of rain, but....then it cleared, and....the light! the skies! the colours! were often even more dramatic in winter. The view from my back door was often stunning, and a real feast for a photographer.

Keeping warm in a cottage heated solely by a coal stove was a satisfying challenge, rewarded by cosy nights snuggled by the flames as the wind howled a banshee round the eaves. My lullaby was the wild waves crashing on the rocks, yards from my pillow.

Verracott

And living so close to the elements has been deeply pleasurable. On stormy days in Verracott, I spent hours by the window, riveted by sea and skies, through the short hours of daylight. One of the most exciting times was the two days of snow we had last January, a brief thin blanketing that transformed landscape sound, texture, shape and colour into an unfamiliar other world.

Night watch

It became a pre-bedtime ritual every night to peek briefly through the front door to check the lighthouse beam and its endless 10-second circlings. No matter how thick the cloud, how black or wild the night, there it swung, unfailingly - the comforting lantern of the night-watch.



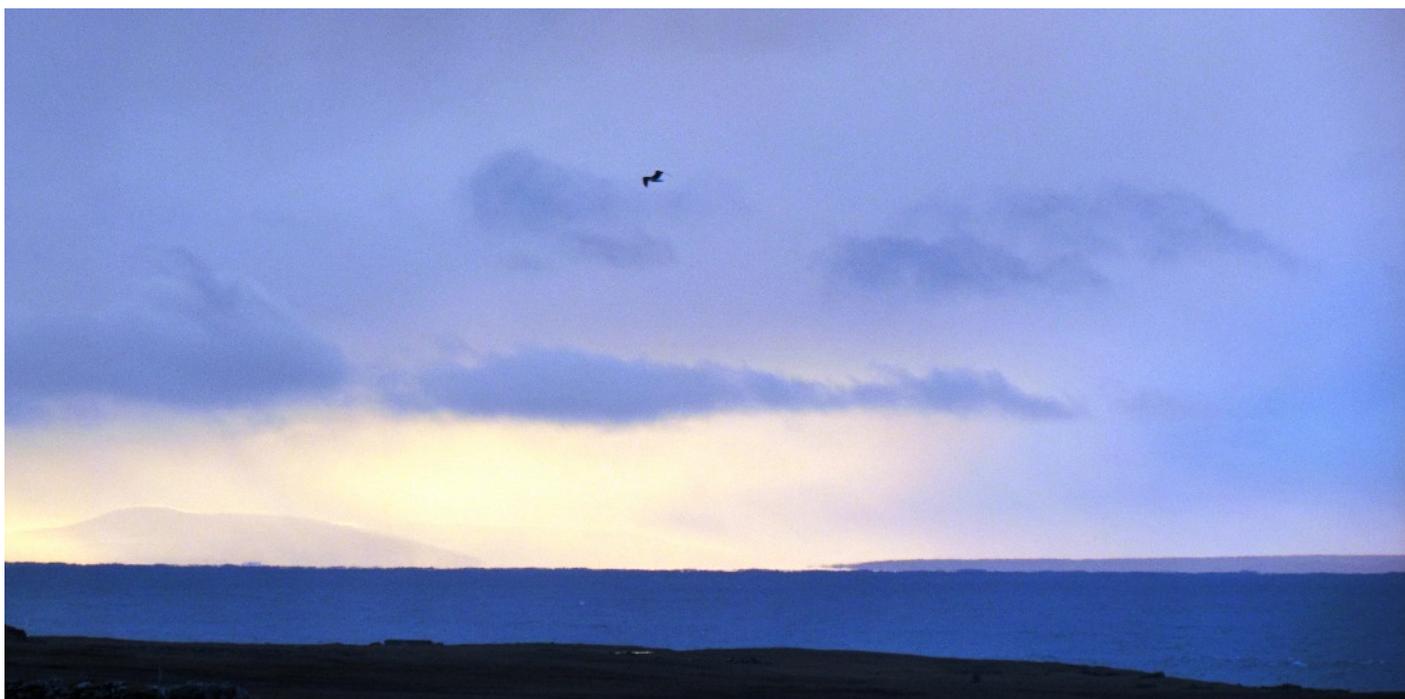
The lighthouse has always entranced and intrigued me. It's at the heart of an art and writing project I began on my first stay here in 2015, and hope to finish this year. Fellow newcomers and visitors - have you been up to the lighthouse in darkness yet? Try it! it's indescribable and magical.

And it's been interesting, lovely, surprising, to experience community in a completely new way for me, coming from the impersonal anonymity of city hordes to a community of 50-ish diverse individuals. For me, our social events - singing, film, tai chi/yoga, Burns supper, Harvest Home, and the rest - have been some of the most enjoyable bits of island life for me. Balancing these pleasurable times of warmth and socializing with an equally strong need for long periods of solitude and quiet (I'm a grumpy introvert at heart) isn't always easy, but I'm getting there.

Now I've moved to a different cottage, on the opposite east side of the island. The sea is nearer, and a bit more accessible. I have a new cooker, so I'm looking forward to some baking stints this winter. I may grow a few things in the spring, salty wind and water permitting.

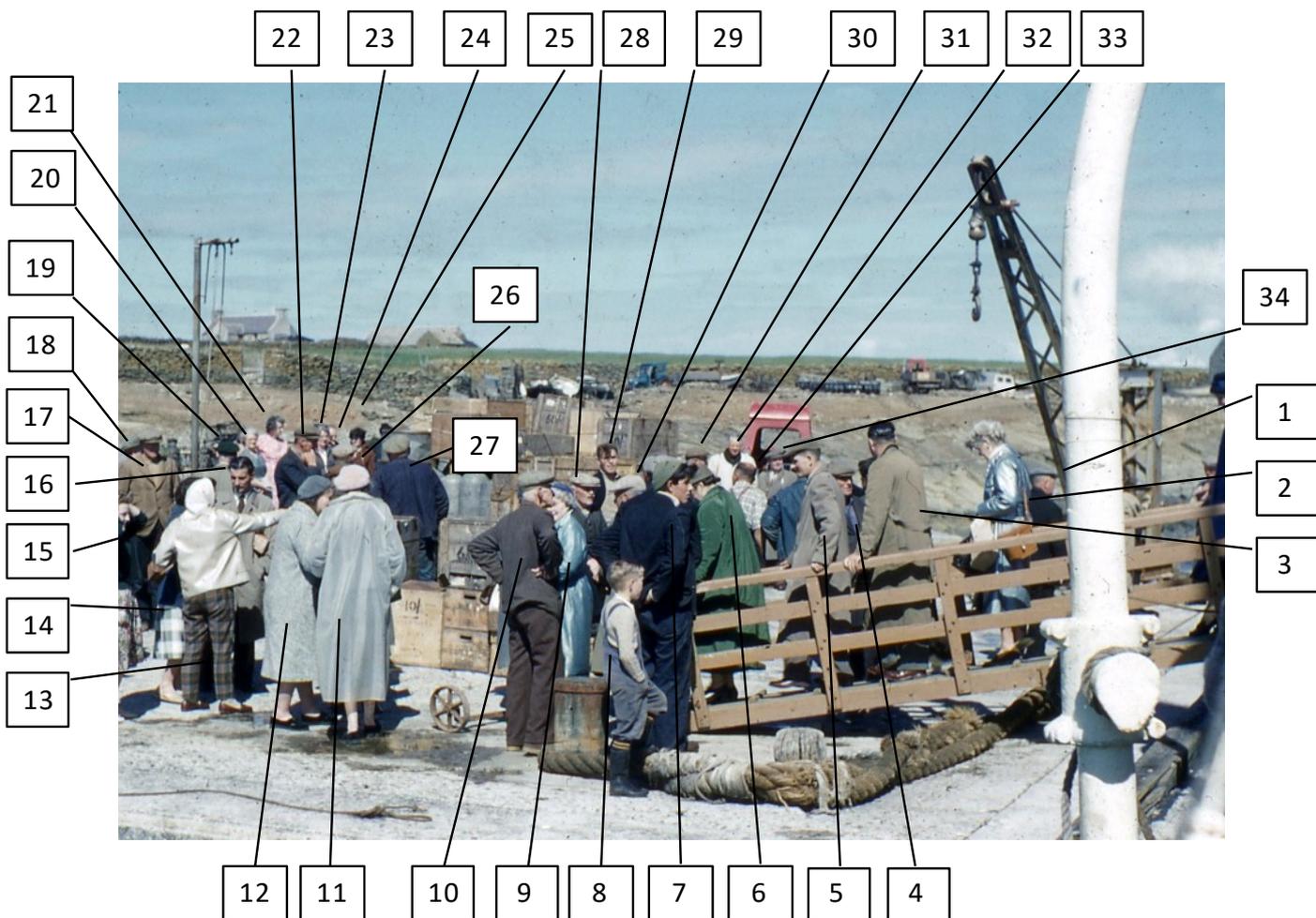
So I'm surviving, even thriving. I miss family and friends back south terribly, painfully at times. I'm still getting used to cancelled ferries. But island life is growing on me.

Other bits about me: I love photography, my granddaughter (too far away), the sea, Brussels sprouts, cake and cats. I also like doing print and bookmaking, and occasionally write songs and poetry. I wish I was braver about cold water swimming. The bane of my life is arthritis.



"Ice Blue" Sue Taylor

This photo appeared on the Orkney Past and Present Facebook page, but not many people were identified and the year was also unknown. Can you name anyone or the year? Piece of paper or alexandrawright70@gmail.com



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