

Autumn
2020

NEWSLETTER



Daryl and James



Chris, Ezri, Robin, Phoebe and Charlotte



Rael and Sara

Welcome to our new residents
and a new baby



Nicola (nee Weston) and Gavin Lindsay had a baby boy on 10th October 2020, Peter John Lindsay, a budding playmate for older brother Nathan. Arriving from Canada and following 14 days of self-isolation, Peter's Granny Linda Weston (nee Tulloch originally from Scottigar) was able to join the family in Perthshire to help for a few weeks.

AUTUMN 2020

JOHN SCOTT, CHAIR, NORTH RONALDSAY TRUST

There are so many great articles in this Newsletter I shall keep this brief and let the reader get to the interesting parts. Two reminders from the previous Newsletter:

Membership: For those who may not yet have returned Membership Forms and if appropriate, Subscription Forms, please do send these to Alison Duncan at Lurand asap.

Dykework: Training sessions have now commenced. If interested and if you have not already done so, please contact either Michael Scott or Alison Duncan for more information.

As part of a North Ronaldsay Trust fundraising exercise, folk on NR had very kindly donated items to be sold at the Blue Door charity shop in Kirkwall. Unfortunately this did not happen due to lockdown and as an alternative we are now looking to sell the items donated on NR at Quoybanks shop / on eBay. A number of residents had asked whether items could be sold locally, so now is the chance to find the bargains.

The 2019 annual accounts for both NRT and the subsidiary company are available. These can be emailed and / or copies sent to each NR shop, if these are of interest.

An additional point of interest, there is an exhibition by of artwork by island residents curated by Sue Taylor at Twinyas/OBS with the theme 'My Lockdown Life', one of the many positive initiatives by residents during Covid restrictions.

2020 is a year we are unlikely to forget for some time given the global impact and uncertainty created by the pandemic. However, life goes on, and in many ways NR has arguably been less negatively impacted compared to other parts of the country. We have seen a number of positive events over recent years and during 2020 – a significant increase in population, bringing in younger people with energy and enthusiasm and with more houses occupied. If we can average one additional house occupied per year it would be transformational for NR.

Putting 2020 behind us and looking to the future, I recently read an article in Metro featuring an interview with Billy Muir. The article was following up on his 2016 success in the Pride of Britain awards. It finished with a quote from Billy: 'You have to let some young people in to make a living for themselves and take on the island for future generations', and this is what we are seeing with younger people now living on NR and younger people involved in the community, including Heather Woodbridge, Orkney's youngest Councillor.

We welcome new islanders who shall inevitably bring new ideas; it is however important to balance these with existing organisations, traditions and structures. By retaining the rich heritage of the island, the culture and community traditions, we shall retain that which makes NR unique and of interest to visitors and potential new residents. The NRT objectives include focus on heritage and preservation; however we are also keen to see further development and opportunities for islanders.

Thanks to all for their support throughout the year and best wishes for 2021.

Good news! AmazonSmile is now available in the Amazon Shopping app on iPhones and Android phones.

AmazonSmile customers can now support North Ronaldsay Trust in the Amazon shopping app on iPhones and Android phones! Simply follow these instructions to turn on AmazonSmile and start generating donations.

- Open the Amazon Shopping app on your device
- Go into the main menu of the Amazon Shopping app and tap into 'Settings
- Tap 'AmazonSmile' and follow the on-screen instructions to complete the process
- Search under either 'North Ronaldsay Trust' or the charity number 'SC030545'



Each purchase via Amazon Smile results in 0.5% of the purchase value being donated to NRT, so please set up NRT as your favoured charity and remember to access Amazon Smile when using Amazon.

SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

Please send in your articles and photograph of any births, marriages, graduations etc.

We don't want to miss any special occasions.

REPRINTS

Extra printed copies are £6 each plus £2 postage

alexandrawright70@gmail.com or 01857 466323

WELCOME TO THE AUTUMN 2020 NEWSLETTER

Thank you to everyone who contributed their wonderful articles and pictures. Thank you to Sue Taylor for her hours and hours of proof reading. Please send your articles, interviews, quizzes, photos, art etc to: alexandrawright70@gmail.com

REPORT FROM COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT MANAGER

HELGA SCOTT, OLD MANSE

A quick update on a few current projects. As always, if anyone is interested in getting involved or has any questions, please do get in touch - cdm@northronaldsaytrust.com .

Recycling

Thank you to folk that completed and returned the recycling questionnaire. Priorities identified from it were cardboard, glass and plastic recycling, community compost-making scheme, education on recycling of metals and other materials, and a tool-share scheme.

In order to make a start with education on recycling materials as requested in the questionnaire, please see information in this newsletter from Orkney Islands Council about what can be recycled in our current facilities on North Ronaldsay and how to avoid contaminating the recyclable material. Please always remember to remove lids from bottle and jars.

Vertical farming

A few words from Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) on a feasibility study that is currently being carried out and in which North Ronaldsay is included:

'HIE is undertaking a study to assist community groups in understanding the feasibility of options for local place-based horticulture. There is an increasing movement to source more produce locally, as food provenance, food security and reducing food miles becomes increasingly important. HIE is commissioning this study in order to explore the commercial viability of producing fruit and vegetables at a relatively small scale to serve local populations, which, if proved to be effective, could be applied to a number of remote and rural parts of the Highlands and Islands.

After initial discussions held between community development trusts and HIE staff, a need has been established for a better way of achieving a fresh vegetable and fruit supply for modest populations (between 60 and 600) on off-mainland Orkney islands. This commission will explore the relative merits of vertical farming, outdoor horticulture and covered horticulture, for several island-based pilots in a place-based and local food supply chain context, recognising the availability of constrained renewable energy. It is believed that vertical farming techniques have the potential to improve quality, yield and freshness of produce, food security, reduce food miles and food waste, and even supply protein-rich animal feed. However, this needs to be rigorously tested against more traditional outdoor growing and growing undercover techniques.

If the application of emerging techniques can be confirmed to be commercially viable at the appropriate scale, it is hoped that this will accelerate the uptake and commercialisation of innovation in low carbon and local food supply. It is expected that by blending the local food supply objective with available constrained energy and the growing of complementary 'cash crops' for local value-add or export, the overall commercial strength and resilience of the operations will be enhanced.

It could be that in some cases, Trusts may be able to more economically achieve their goals, at the scale they envisage, by using more conventional horticultural techniques. If covered horticulture or vertical farming do appear technically and commercially feasible, the community will be consulted on which of those it would prefer to have detailed proposals developed for. Those proposals should be sufficient to support procurement and establishment of the preferred covered only or vertical farming infrastructure in each perceived viable location.'

Supporting Communities Fund

The last of the Supporting Communities Fund has been used for reusable, fabric snoods, made on island by Edie Craigie. These will be available to everyone that was eligible for the food and fuel vouchers earlier in the year.

Energy Pathfinder

Energy Pathfinder is an international project researching near zero-energy in historic buildings.

The project is supported by the Northern Periphery & Arctic (NPA) region Europe and involves partners from Scotland, Ireland, Sweden, Finland and the Faroe Islands. North Ronaldsay's lighthouse keeper's cottages are included in the project as a case study. The project will provide energy advice, investigation and monitoring to support a better understanding of the two buildings, which will be useful to support any future upgrades and repairs, such as energy generation or heating systems.

Community Led Tourism Fund

North Ronaldsay Trust have recently been successful in securing funding from Highlands and Islands Enterprise through their Community Led Tourism Fund for items such as fixed hand sanitisation equipment and equipment that helps adaption to new market conditions and safer/improved working conditions.



SHEEP DYKE WARDEN UPDATE

SIÂN TARRANT, THE SCHOOLHOUSE



Orkney International Science Festival

This year I was involved with two events at the Orkney International Science Festival: Sheep on the Shore and Resources on the Shore. For the latter, I wanted to explore North Ronaldsay wool as a sustainable island resource through the medium of film. The film has been watched over 15,000 times and had a brilliant reception.

For Sheep on the Shore, I presented alongside Dr Jessica Adams of Aberystwyth University who researches how micro-organisms in the gut of North Ronaldsay sheep may assist macroalgae degradation for biofuel production, Dr Katerina Theodoridou of Queen's University Belfast who researches how seaweed as a livestock feed additive can cut methane and ammonia pollution and reduce soya usage, and enzyme-researcher Dr Luisa Ciano of Nottingham University.



Channel 4

After a long (and very much appreciated) break from TV and radio, I have been back in front of the cameras with Channel 4's programme Food Unwrapped. They wanted to film a piece looking at whether one can taste the difference in North Ronaldsay mutton due to their seaweed diet. It was a pretty soggy day, but we battled on through the rain. The presenter attempted some dyke building, but it was swiftly removed after filming!

Training dyke workers

I've been very grateful to have the opportunity to train some island residents in building the sheep dyke. It's been great having others to work with, the dyke goes up much faster with more than one pair of hands! Having a new generation of residents who are able to build the dyke will be invaluable should huge swathes crumble in future winter storms, and for help leading volunteers at the Sheep Festival.



One year on North Ronaldsay

Olly and I have been here one year. It's a cliché, but where has the time gone! Looking ahead to my second year as Sheep Dyke Warden, it's hard to imagine what can be achieved in terms of offering volunteer opportunities, working holiday experiences, and student placements alongside Covid-19 restrictions.

I grow more passionate about these intrepid sheep and their future each day that I spend in their company. The Sheep Dyke is a precious historical structure, which alongside the island's other historical sites and traditions, must be preserved.



REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY SID OGILVIE, CURSITTER



Jimmy Craigie, Barrie Asquith and Sinclair Scott

On 8 November at 11am, the island observed Remembrance Sunday in traditional fashion, with an attendance of well over 30 folk, which included the welcome addition of five small children and their parents.

The two minutes silence was followed by a lament, beautifully played as usual by Sinclair Scott on the bagpipes; the poppy wreath was laid at the foot of the memorial by Jimmy Craigie, our retired lighthouse keeper; and the famous lines from Binyon's poem *To the Fallen* were solemnly read by Barrie Asquith of Gerbo.

Although it was a pleasant change to see our friends and neighbours en masse again, the meeting lacked the usual socialising which follows the ceremony, due to the virus restrictions.

NORTH ISLES BY-ELECTION RESULT HEATHER WOODBRIDGE, LURAND

As of 5 December, I have been working as Councillor for the North Isles ward for two months.

It has been an incredible and rewarding experience so far, and I feel so privileged to have the opportunity to represent the North Isles in the Chamber.

At the moment, meetings are taking place virtually, and we continue to work as hard - if not harder - with these protective measures.

When it is safe, I hope to visit every island in the ward and speak with folk in person. In the meantime, please get in touch through my Council email: Heather.Woodbridge@orkney.gov.uk

I want to know about the issues that matter to you, so please feel free to get in touch about any issue.

AUTUMN BULB PLANT ALEX WRIGHT, BRECKAN

On Remembrance Sunday fifteen of us, including Dave the dog, planted a stretch of daffodil bulbs on either side of the road towards the lighthouse from Quoybanks.

Bulbs were difficult to get hold of this year, so we only had a hundred to plant in little groups of 6 or so. The job was soon finished and I look forward to the bold yellow flowers brightening the verges in the spring and providing much needed nourishment for pollinators.



THE COMMUNITY CENTRE IS OPEN

Our risk assessment has now been approved so we can open the Community Centre. On display are posters, risk assessment. There is also hand sanitizer and COVID kit in the entrance.

The centre can be used if 1) a key holder is present and 2) centre is pre-booked with Alex - this is to meet track & trace rules; and 3) in groups of no more than 6 folks from 2 households, in line with government guidance, which still has to be followed whatever rules are in place.

Observe good hand hygiene and social distancing

Users must leave the centre clean and tidy and sanitise any items/door handles etc. used

The key holders are committee members, so that's Alison, Heather, Anne, Sheila, Winnie, Billy, Louis, Alex, Jack and Peter.

SETTLING BACK IN NORTH RONALDSAY SARA MACÍAS RODRÍGUEZ



Sara and Rael on their wedding day

After our arrival in March, we had a busy spring and summer carrying out the usual census and monitoring of the breeding birds on the island, and an even busier autumn as the Bird Observatory was able to welcome visitors as well as some very rare birds which contributed to the excitement of the staff and “birdie” visitors alike. Then, luckily for us, a place became available for rent and we moved in at the end of October.

More happy times followed as on 6 November we got married at Kirkwall Town Hall in the presence of our friends and witnesses Alison and Heather, and later had a small do back on North Ronaldsay. We are really happy to be back on the island, and are planning to stay and enjoy life here. Thank you for all the gifts and best wishes from the Islanders, and for those unable to come to Twingness, we still plan to have a party in August.



A NEW WINTER EXPERIENCE JAMES WILSON

Hi, we’re James and Daryl. We have spent the autumn of 2019 and now autumn 2020 at the Bird Observatory, doing daily bird surveys and ringing, and this year doing paid housekeeping work, with Daryl as the head housekeeper and myself, James, in charge of guest rooms. This year we are excited to be spending our first winter on North Ronaldsay and looking forward to getting a permanent home here next spring!

I have to admit, I was a little apprehensive about how a winter would be here, but we were both up for the experience of living up north in such a wild environment during the dark months. Nevertheless, now that things have quietened down, we’re very much enjoying the cosy nights in, and feeling thrilled to be here!

We love the community aspect of being on the island, and are trying to get involved with as many different things as possible, from the regular litter picks and sea swims, to engaging the children on the island with kid-friendly bird watching and identification walks, and art sessions. We’re both quite creative people with backgrounds in wildlife, research and education, and hope for this island to be our home for the foreseeable future.



James and Daryl warming up by the stove after a chilly sea swim

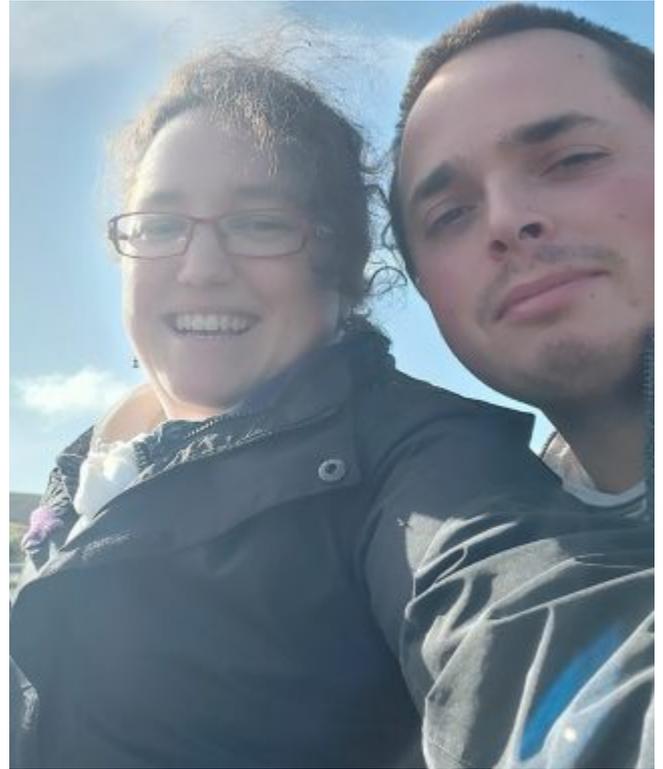
A DEVONSHIRE INVASION CHRIS KERSLAKE, QUOYBANKS

Phew! I am finally making some time to sit down and write this for the next eagerly awaited North Ronaldsay Newsletter! So, in case you don't already know, and are wondering who the hell we are - grab a nice fresh coffee from that new little shop at Quoybanks, take a comfy seat, and I will tell you...

We are some of the latest newcomers, the Kerslake family! Consisting of myself (Chris), Charlotte (my wife), and 3 young children Robin, Phoebe & Ezri. After the longest wait ever through the lockdown, we finally moved into Quoybanks on the last weekend of August 2020. At the time of writing this, we are now getting close to the end of November, and I like to think we have achieved a lot in our first few months on the island.

So far we have fought hard to make sure the school will reopen and in the meantime, tried hard to give our children some sort of continuity with their education. We have had great support from the team at Burray school on Mainland Orkney, and currently the children have a virtual classroom with a teacher twice a week, with Charlotte home-schooling the rest of the time. We also have the occasional visit to Burray school itself, (This alone has turned out to be a full-time enterprise, believe me!)

While all that has been going on, I have been trying my hardest to make sure we have a sustainable future here, at the same time as trying to help and work with other islanders who have been very supportive, and to create viable businesses that complement each other. Of course, I am



Charlotte and Chris



Robin, Ezri, Charlotte and Phoebe

speaking primarily of the new little shop we have created in the outbuilding attached to Quoybanks, named "Easting Road Store". We also have an online webstore, and my hope (and it is already starting to work) is for it to provide an income for our family, but also to offer a sales avenue for other small enterprises on the island. And if successful, even some employment opportunities for other residents in the future.

At the shop, we will evolve over time, but currently offer sort of "general store" items at affordable prices for the residents, as well as a new attraction to visit, for visitors and residents alike for fresh barista coffee, home bakes, treats, refreshments and gifts. I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has supported our venture so far!

It may seem we have been moving fast, but this lifestyle is something we have dreamed of for many years, and as a family, we are determined and committed to make it work (and unfortunately, surviving doesn't come for free!). Although we hadn't visited North Ronaldsay itself before visiting to view the house, we had been to Orkney. And loved the atmosphere, scenery and history of the isles. But if I am honest, we hadn't picked North Ronaldsay for our new adventure particularly. It's really just how the cards landed....

Originally, we are from North Devon, and my family has always been born and bred there, and the same for the majority of Charlotte's family. Living and working, on and around Exmoor, Barnstaple, Bideford, Torrington, and my home town of South Molton. But alas, our home towns were not the picturesque and



Robin

tranquil little southwest towns they used to be, and to make matters worse, they were in England... haha!

After a few holidays to the Scottish Highlands and islands, we were soon looking for our opportunity to move. Being of the generation that is mostly destined to rent for life made our Scottish island dream feel almost impossible, what with the cost of actually moving, along with private family-sized rents for incomers being extremely hard to acquire. This meant we were open to also moving to the Hebrides or Shetland, but our hope was for Orkney.

After a couple of years of no luck, and after watching Robin start to suffer at his overcrowded school, an opportunity presented itself. I was due a small payout due to a company takeover at my job, and so we decided on the Highlands for our escape from England. We managed to get a home on the rural outskirts of Beaulieu. (We drove about 13 hours and camped in April so I could attend a job interview.) There we stayed for just over two years, and loved every bit - the mountains, the wildlife, and the people. But it wasn't the isles, and our rental still didn't allow us any freedom to run a business etc.

Every couple months or so, I would go on a hunt online, searching for rentals in the isles, and emailing various island trusts etc. Then, one day last year, I actually got a reply from the North Ronaldsay Trust, with a suggestion to contact the owner of Quoybanks, as she may be interested in a residential let. And, well we found our opportunity! And the rest as they say, is history.

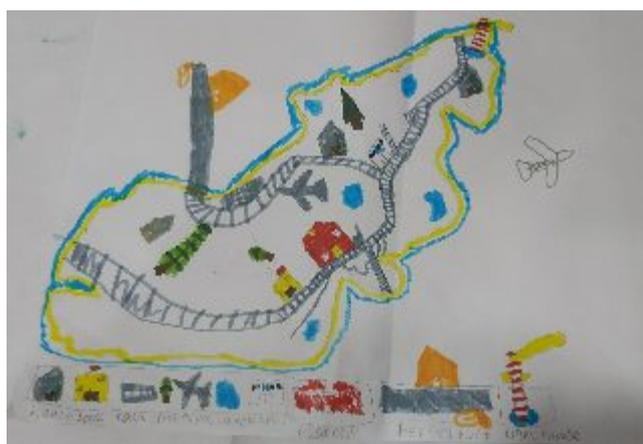
And so far, there are no regrets. You may think us mad, but we love the challenge of the logistics of living here, and how it makes you appreciate life in general much more when you live in a remote part of the country such as North Ronaldsay. Not to mention, the peace and tranquility!

Robin has also written a little bit about himself and his sisters, along with some drawings of the island they have done:

“Hello my name is Robin, I am 9 years old. My favourite colours are blue and black. I like living in North Ronaldsay because it is beautiful and everybody I have met is kind. I like to go walking around to see what I can find.

I have two little sisters. Phoebe's favourite colours are red and pink. She likes living here because we are close to the sea and beach. She loves visiting the lambs and looking for rabbits.

Ezri's favourite colours are green and purple. She loves being on the sand and seeing the lambs.”



North Ronaldsay by Robin



North Ronaldsay by Phoebe

LET'S RECYCLE RIGHT - BINS AT THE PIER

Metals bin

Yes please: Food cans/tins, drink cans/tins, aluminium foil, aerosol cans, metal lids from jars/bottles, foil trays, lids and food wrappers (all clean and empty).

Please rinse, do not crush or pierce, place can tops inside cans and remove labels.

No thanks: Paint/petrol cans.

Glass bin

Yes please: Glass bottles and glass jars.

Remove bottle and jar lids. Please rinse. All colours accepted.

No thanks: Light bulbs, cookware (eg Pyrex) or broken glass.



Paper/thin card bin

Yes please: Unwanted mail, magazines, thin card (eg cereal box), newspaper, envelopes and shredded paper.

Please flatten thin card boxes.

No thanks: Cardboard, cartons, plastic envelopes, large catalogues and egg boxes.

Recyclates are more valuable when they are clean and free of contamination. If a recycling bank is contaminated, the existing material in the bank would be contaminated as well, potentially rendering a whole bank of recycling unfit when deposited at Chinglebraes (the Council's waste transfer/sorting station).

This can mean significant additional cost to the Council and can affect the Council's recycling performance.



Electrical goods can be brought to Hatston HWRC or Restart Orkney

NHS AND SURGERY UPDATE

IAN HALL

Hi folks - it's nice to be able to write something with some good news. This week (from the 13 November) Orkney's Tier 1 officially allows us to have two households mix for up to six people (with the usual precautions). The only caveat is that we need to protect the isles communities, so any essential travel from outwith Orkney will have to follow any current quarantine advice (as yet to be published). Obviously the Scottish government advice will change over time, so double-check for up-to-date advice. Remember, it is essential that we continue to wash our hands regularly, wear facemasks, and maintain two metres social distance.

We also heard this week that there is positive news coming out of the international vaccine trials. The NHS has been told to prepare for this, although there are still safety checks and processes to complete before we work out the logistics of delivery. We will let you know when there is any more news of that.

The other area where COVID has demanded changes from everyone has been management of appointments. The previously used drop-in-style clinics are now advised against to avoid surgeries becoming a place of risk of spreading the virus. It is the asymptomatic carrier threat that we have to mitigate against. So because of this, please can I ask anyone wanting to come to surgery to phone ahead first. If it is just to collect meds, then these can be left in the porch for you to collect. If it is for an appointment, we will agree a time with you so that the room is ready and there is time between visitors to clean the chairs and equipment down.

Several people have asked me recently about clinic times. I have deliberately not changed the status quo with so much other change going on this year. Having said that, I am very happy to offer an appointment between 0900-1100 am Monday to Friday. Tuesday 0830-1030 remains unchanged as GP and blood clinic. For a Tuesday GP appointment, you can either book by phone with me (01857 633226) or with Heilendi reception (01856 888270). These appointments are quite busy at the moment, so book ahead if you can. I am happy to continue to offer Friday evening and Saturday morning for anyone who can't get in at a regular time, but as before, please phone first to arrange the appointment.

Ian Hall, Advanced Nurse Practitioner
01857 633226

A MESSAGE FROM NHS ORKNEY DENTAL DIRECTOR - NOVEMBER 2020

In a recent memorandum, the Chief Dental Officer for Scotland has announced that:

From 1st November we are moving to Phase 4 of the NHS Dental Remobilisation Plan. This means that NHS dental contractors will be able to provide the full range of NHS treatments to all patients in need of both urgent and non-urgent care.'

This is a significant step forward and I welcome this increase in the scope of care available as an NHS option. However, I am sorry to have to add that the additional 'Covid' safety measures we have in place continue to affect the way dentists are able to provide your care. It's similar to the situation restaurants find themselves in - the menu is back to the full list, but we have fewer tables. In relation to dentistry, we are able to provide a full range of NHS treatments, but Covid still limits the number of patients we can see in a day. I'm afraid we are a way off a return to 'business as usual.'

Your dentist has been given the difficult task of prioritising appointments for their patient list. This will not be easy and therefore, I need to ask for your continued patience and understanding. You may be asked to wait for a time when dentists can safely return to the numbers of patients that used to be seen in practices each day.

While the number of available appointments continues to be reduced, I would also warn that practices will look very different when you attend. This is due to the public health measures that are in place to keep staff and patients safe. Waiting rooms may be closed and dental teams will be wearing more personal protective equipment than you may have been used to.

If you would like more information, useful resources are online as follows:

- General advice regarding Coronavirus: www.nhsinform.scot
- A short video describing NHS Dental Care: www.youtube.com and search for "NHS 24 Guide to Dental Services"
- Accessing dental care: www.nhsinform.scot and search for "Accessing dental services"

I would like to offer my thanks to all those working to restore NHS dentistry in Orkney and both residents and visitors for their patience as dentistry is carefully reintroduced.

Should you need to get in touch with a dentist, the access is described below.

During working hours:

- Patients registered either at The Balfour (01856 888258) or Garson (01856 850658) should contact the clinic where they are usually seen.
- Any patient who is not currently registered and who has an urgent dental problem should contact **01856 850658** and you will be directed accordingly.
- If you are registered at Orkney Dental Kirkwall, Orkney Dental Stromness, or the Daisybank Clinic, then please contact them direct for advice on the following numbers:
- Orkney Dental Kirkwall – 01856 872030
- Orkney Dental Stromness – 01856 852815
- Daisybank Clinic – 01856 870547
- If you are registered at Deyanov Dental, then please contact on:
- Deyanov Dental - 07717477629

Out of hours emergencies:

- Patients should use the usual process and contact NHS 24 (111)

I would respectfully remind everyone that, if your problem is urgent, you will be seen, if not, you may be asked to wait.

As the situation evolves, updates will be posted, particularly via social media (Facebook and Twitter) and on NHS Orkney's website. I would encourage people to regularly check those sources for the latest information.

Jay Wragg

Director of Dentistry

NHS Orkney

NORTH RONALDSAY VOICES



~ An Oral History ~

“Huds a disaster because thurs jist
nobody here ...”

– Ann Marwick

“Leprosy was in the island ...”

“In one sense the
weemen worked harder
than the men ...”

“...these sheep can predict
the turn o’ the tide ...”

Price £23.75 from The Orcadian Bookshop, 50 Albert Street, Kirkwall - www.orcadian.co.uk

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A REVIEW OF NORTH RONALDSAY VOICES CLLR HEATHER WOODBRIDGE

Ann Marwick's book, *North Ronaldsay Voices ~ an Oral History*, offers a comprehensive and easy to read collection of Orkney dialect voices in North Ronaldsay form.

As sound archivist for over a decade from the 1980s, Ann recorded many islanders on a number of visits to the island.

This impressive collection of personal moments pulls the reader into island life, farming, the sea, the community, stories, culture and the challenges that faced North Ronaldsay in recent past. Our island communities today face many of the same challenges, and the conversations that Ann has captured provide an important record of local history and the way of life. In North Ronaldsay today, the echoes of these voices still resonate and shape the community we have today.

The photographs taken by Dr Beatrice Garvie (island Doctor in the 1930s) and the map drawn by Karl Cooper are an absolute treat. The photographs taken years before Ann's recordings, beautifully illustrate the interviewees' memories and the childhood world of that generation. Particularly striking is the image of the impressive S.S. Earl Thorfin (p36) alongside the North Ronaldsay pier – the biggest difference between then and now is the vessel!

The interviewees themselves are captured by Kelvin Scott's collection of black and white portraits of islanders taken in 1989.

The conversations have been meticulously recorded and written in North Ronaldsay dialect and this elevates something that cannot be

achieved by writing in standard English. If you knew the people involved, on reading Ann's transcriptions, you can hear their voices lifting from the page, telling their stories in their very own words.

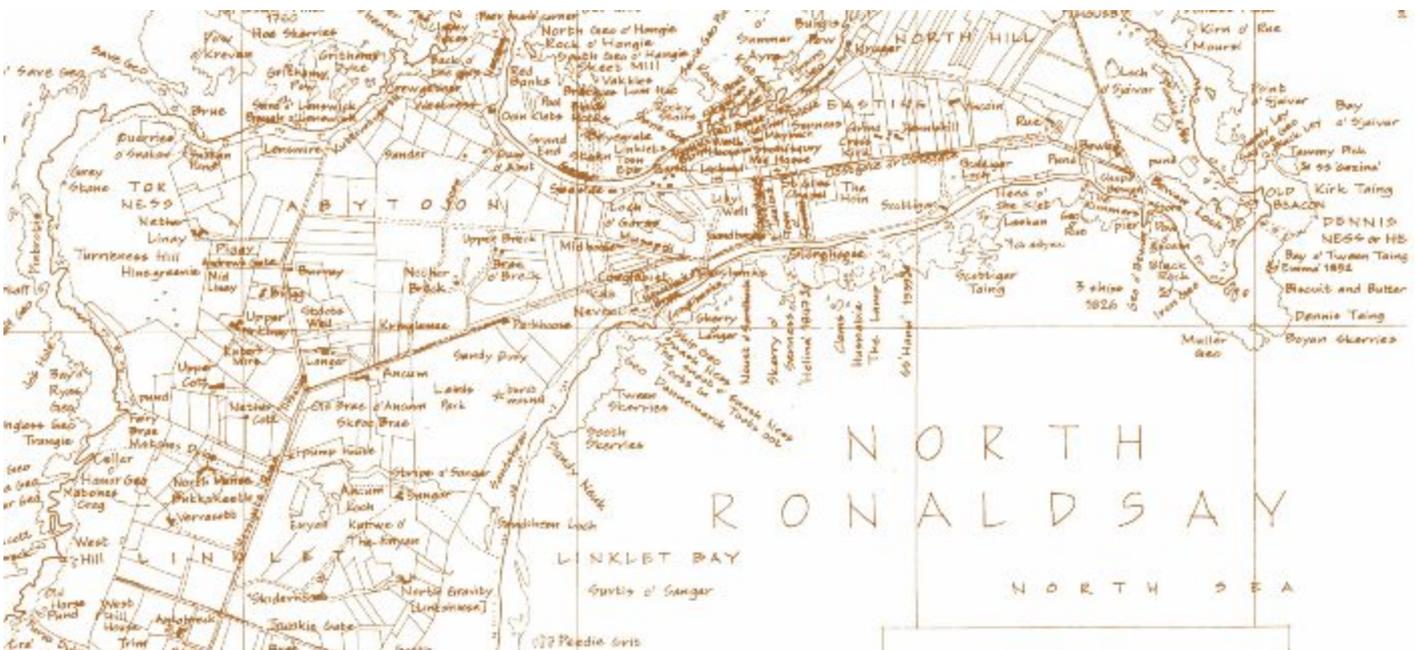
I share Ann's view on the importance of oral history and how strongly this influences communities.

I believe that it is right for Orkney dialect to be celebrated for the treasure it is and for that knowledge to be accessible to every Orcadian, and islander, old and new.

Islands beyond islands are the deepest part of Orkney and are surrounded by strong Orcadian culture through their outward connections. It's hard not to feel that you sit in the heart of Orkney living in one of these island communities.

If you have an interest in Orkney dialect, island communities, local history or Orkney culture, this book is for you.

A superb read - this will be one I return to again and again.



PAINTING DAYS
IAN SCOTT, ANTABRECK



My last NR letter featured one of my oil paintings, whose owner I could not remember. However, the mystery was easily resolved as it turned out it belonged to someone closely related to me. Imagine this sign of a failing memory! Anyway, I thought that this contribution for the quarterly island newsletter might be a little indulgent again by having another oil painting on view. It's one I remember and know where it resides. I thought the painting would give me an opportunity to explain how I worked when using oils or watercolour.

The oil painting (4ft by 2ft) is the property of the Orkney Museum, where it is one of a number of paintings by artists in their possession. Occasionally it can be seen when the Museum replaces one that has been on view for a spell. The painting is one of my favourites, depicting a typical Waast Banks seascape – an area which I have probably painted more than any other part of North Ronaldsay. In many ways the Waast Banks - with its sea, banks, rocky ramparts and fascinating geos, ever-changing in mood and colour as the seasons come and go - is indeed familiar, and a much frequented painting territory of mine.

Whenever an exhibition was planned I set to work. The last two or three months of the year (back-end) was my clearest time for painting, with most of my sculptural pieces completed in the winter months. Spring and summer time on the island was, for me, a busier time of year with work such as land work, lobster-fishing, road repairs, hay and 'hairst' activity. With an exhibition arranged, I firstly primed three or four 4ft by 8ft boards with two coats of white undercoat primer. Then I cut up my painting boards – mostly 24in by 16in - plus maybe a few more oblong shaped boards (31in by 16in) and three or four 4ft by 2ft.

I aimed for about three weeks' painting time (but helping with general farm chores when required). My first day arrived and off I would go, with a WW2 haversack (we used to have them as school-bags) full of tubes of oil-paint, turps, linseed oil, brushes and palette knife over my shoulder, with my easel and palette in one hand and the other carrying the two boards ready for potential paintings. Those boards, back to back, were safe from smudging, as I had one half-moon-shaped single fencing wire (the height of whatever-sized board) with two ends turned up which held the two painting boards, with my hand through the loop and my thumb securing the potential paintings.

Generally, I would firstly try my favourite area at the Waast-banks, thinking I would get on best there to begin my first few days of painting, which were very often failures. I knew what I wanted to achieve but somehow my efforts just didn't always work. Very frustrating could those unproductive days be with nothing to show, but I had to simply knuckle down and persevere.

Since my favourite area is not much more than one-quarter to a half-mile away from Antabreck, I really liked coming back home where I could place my first painting in a frame to assess its merit. If promising, it gave encouragement to carry on. This I always liked to do after a day's painting. It was not until I had the frame round my work that I was either pleased or otherwise. Often the next morning I would touch-up 'holidays' (little white areas not completed as I worked fairly fast) and maybe improve upon my interpretation, but my first attempt mostly remained as initially conceived. With water-colours, there is little or no margin for error and one has, generally speaking, to accept the first attempt. Watercolours are mostly an immediate medium that must work at the first go, whereas with oils one can continue to develop further.

Carrying my equipment, I would walk slowly along the face of the banks (or wherever I happened to be) looking for a possible painting. Good colour and composition were my objectives. Up and down the rocks, moving one way and another, until I thought, 'this is the place'. Into geos I would often go and when the tide was out, in all sorts of places, I saw the coral-coloured underwater rock faces, white, pinks and russet reds, with ochre and brown-coloured seaweeds to be seen growing here and there.

Many were the places round the island I explored, walking sometimes for miles and often coming home in the mirking or darkness of a night as it frequently was at the 'back-end' time of the year. And even when warmly-dressed and wearing gloves, I was uncomfortably cold sitting still painting for an hour or two. Very occasionally I might stop past a friendly house for a cuppa and a 'discoorse' (especially if a painting was not coming on well). But no, painting was a lonely pursuit, and not very often did I enjoy such a break.

Then there were windy days when my painting board would have to be laid flat on the rocks or ground with a stone or two on the edges holding it down. I might be caught in rain or strong winds, and once in November, at the Waast Banks, while painting a seascape, I watched an ominous sky darkening by the minute – a blue-black, inky sky. I had to walk home in a snow storm. Fortunately rain or snow did not affect the oil-painting.

One other time, when painting down among the ebb-tide rocks, when I finished - engrossed as I was - I discovered that the incoming tide had soundlessly surrounded the rock upon which I sat. I had to come away near waist-deep in water. There were one or two other occasions, when I was painting not far away from heavy seas, I noticed a particularly large, ominous-looking wave approaching. I had to leave paints, boards, and easel, and beat a hasty retreat as the wave engulfed the area, submerging my painting gear and ending my efforts on that occasion.

But there were some times in the summer when painting was more of a pleasure and I worked in relative comfort. This was generally the time when I used watercolours. Exhibitions of watercolours have been few and mostly shown in Orkney in more recent years.

Well, here I have tried to describe something of how I used to work. I hope it will be of some interest

At nights, from the Waast Banks, I hear the sound of the sea. Even when it's calm and when the wind is down, there is always a faraway murmur that creeps in through my partly opened bedroom window. In the moonlight, when there is a heavy sea running, I can see the luminous white of breaking waves against the blackness of the sea and the pale, fading blue of the night. One never forgets the sound of the sea surrounding our island. And on winter nights, in the snugness of home, the thunder of breaking waves against dark, rocky ramparts is all around.

When I hear those wild ocean sounds, I often think about my painting days, about those favourite rocky areas and mysterious geos of mine that I know so well being swept by heavy seas with cascading yellowish froth flying far inland. Many an hour and many a day and year have I been there and tried to capture the beauty of those wonderful scenes of rock and sea and island landscapes. Every day is a different day; so will be my interpretation. Maybe it will just be the colours; maybe a little feeling of the abstract; maybe more sculptured rock formations explored and palette knife used. But when all combined together, I hope my work has captured something of the mystique and beauty of North Ronaldsay. Generations come and go, but the land and sea remain.

SWIMMING IN NORTH RONALDSAY **HELGA SCOTT, OLD MANSE**

I have enjoyed swimming in the sea around North Ronaldsay since I was a child. There are so many beautiful spots on the west coast. Two of my favourites are Hangie Rock and Sand Geo, with their jaggedy rocks, I feel like I am swimming in one of Ian's oil paintings.



Helga jumping into pool at Rock O; Hangie, photo by Isabella Scot

MY FIRST SWIM ON NORTH RONALDSAY

JAMES WILSON



I'm not necessarily the kind of person who is immediately interested in new experiences that involve a certain degree of discomfort. Nor am I a good or even a competent swimmer. And I'm actually not a huge fan of being cold.

But there was something about the buzz that I observed around the island wild swimming group - the North Ronaldsay Selkies - that really drew me in. Hearing how exhilarating it was, how good you felt afterwards, how it really set you up for the day, or was a great way to finish the day, or any other similar sentiment. It is a very supportive group, and I always felt extremely welcome and encouraged by the members. It also just seems like one of those good experiences, like cliff jumping or bungee jumping, that enrich your life journey, a noble endeavour, whilst also giving you a good story to tell your mum, or your children one day. 'You did what?!' Yeah I know mum, I'm just as surprised as you are.

Maybe I should outline the process of this first swim. So I had been considering the idea of joining the group for a swim for a little while, and I ended up voicing this to Alex (my first mistake) which was met with overwhelming enthusiasm, and then it seemed inevitable. On 3 November I got up before the 9 am start, donned the trunks, towel robe and crocs, and headed off on the bike down the Bird Obs track to Nouster Bay. It was a gloriously bright and relatively still morning, and the bay was glistening in the late autumn sun. I met Alex, Chris, Sian and Olly at the gate, all mentally and physically preparing as well. Some light chitchat, and then it was time.

The moment was here, and there was no turning back. We began walking down the beach in our swim gear, some wetsuited, and others, like me, in just a regular bathing suit. The light winds hitting my bare chest and legs was a new sensation, and hastened my walk slightly. Then we had reached the water, and, after a moment's preparation, I began those first steps into the North Sea. I had done this on the beach at home, of course, but I never tended to go in, unless it was a particularly nice day. It's like stepping into an ice bath or a cold shower, and your body goes into a slight shock as it's trying to process what is happening. I took the journey quite slowly, doing lots of awkward high knees and uttering an array of involuntary noises.

I had been assured by everyone that your body becomes numb to this initial cold, and sure enough, after wading in up to my thighs back and forth for what can't have been more than a minute or two, I got used to the cold of the water. I began to go a little further in, waist-deep and slightly beyond. The water actually started to feel a little warm! It was strange. Throughout this whole process, Olly was acting as my personal cheerleader/hype-man, staying with me in the slightly shallower part and listening encouragingly to my exclamations and excited ramblings.

It's important to note that, as others in the group will back up, there isn't always a lot of 'swimming' in the traditional sense happening out there; maybe some bobbing up and down and bracing for waves, and a few stray strokes if one is feeling adventurous. Some people properly swim I've been told, and I don't want to besmirch their good names, but I have not seen it yet. However, I think the main thing is the achievement of getting yourself into the water, out in nature, and out of one's comfort zone.

The most wonderful part of the experience had nothing to do with the cold water experience directly, but part of the way through as I began to get used to the water, I started to take note of my surroundings more, and realised just how beautiful and wonderful it was to be looking back at the island from the water. I noticed some waders on the rocks, and a fulmar wheeling overhead, suspended in time and space just for a moment, and away again, low over the waves and banking against the beach dyke. It's one thing being wrapped up in warm fleeces and winter coats looking through binoculars from the land, but a whole other thing feeling the elements in such a natural and primal way, as an animal among animals, those animals for which the cold of the water and the sand and wind on exposed feathers and skin is a normal occurrence. I can't understate how connected I felt to the natural world in that moment, immersed and exposed in the shallows, my body alert and my heart beating, the morning sun on my back, as I observed the world around me with a different perspective. I felt alive.

Then of course, as I had hoped, we were lucky enough to be visited by some inquisitive seals. A small common seal approached us curiously, peeking its head out of the water as I watched in wonder. It went under the surface and swam round past us, to emerge even closer! It can't have been more than a few metres away, poking its head up above the water, sunning itself and observing casually. I felt so much reverence for the intelligence and curiosity this seal showed towards us, seemingly at ease despite its proximity to us, clearly so comfortable in its ocean environment. They may be clumsy on land, but watching them move through the water is a joy to behold, graceful and effortless.



After 5-10 minutes (hard to tell really), everyone agreed it was time to get out. We returned to the land, wrapped ourselves in towels, and whizzed off to our respective warm places. I felt great all day, like I had accomplished something, and thought 'I should do this every morning!'. Well that hasn't exactly happened, but nobody's perfect. And it's not always a beautiful sunrise and relatively wind-free. But I have done it several times since, and I tentatively say that I plan to make it a regular part of my life for as long as I am blessed to live so close to the sea (partly because it means I can rush off to a warm house in as short a time as possible!). All in all, if anyone else is on the fence about the idea of joining the group for a swim, I'd really recommend giving it a go, we'd love to have you!

THE POOL, WESTNESS ALEX WRIGHT, BRECKAN

An unexpected delight at Westness has been the Pool, an area of sea water that forms a completely enclosed huge tidal pool when the tide goes out.

These safe, calm waters have been the perfect spot to try out surface snorkelling and we have been lucky enough to spot crabs and fish in the dense underwater seaweed forests.

This is the perfect place for novice or nervous sea swimmers.

I can't pronounce its name correctly, but it sounds a bit like like p'cau'l (the eau as in water in French).



HARVEST MOON SELKIES OLLY GIBB, THE SCHOOLHOUSE

Turning on head torches, we scampered into the darkness and across the grass towards Linklet Bay. Maybe we'd missed our chance? A shy moon lay hidden like a secret behind thick clouds as we searched for a good spot to leave our towels. Cold toes winced as we walked into the night sea, worried we'd never see the special moon in the gloomy sky.

But as we plunged into the breaking waves, a blood-red harvest moon rose through a gap in the thickening clouds, covering the bay in a soft cloak of light. We rejoiced in the serendipitous moonlight as it gleamed off our teeth, revealing grins. As the night brightened, we flicked off our head torches and saw a fiery Mars sparkling ruby and scarlet. Distant wave crests glistened under the shimmering planet as waves broke around us, splashing bright diamonds from the sea.

As the moon retreated behind dense clouds, we withdrew from the water. Drying salty skin, we stilled chattering teeth and made our way home, smiling at vivid memories of the moon and planet that we had shared our swim with.



CLLOUDNET UPDATE HELEN GALLAND, RUE



Hi ya, Helen here. Many will already know/associate me with Woolly Wally, but I'm now taking over in a voluntary manner, the role Mark Holbrook had with Cloudnet, the family run local Internet service provider! Basically it is not a technical position ('cos I'd be rubbish at that) but, should the hub that's been installed on island go down, for any reason, they can contact me to go check it out, rather than wait/pay for someone from mainland to go check.

Other than that, it's business as usual. I know, on the grapevine, that there have been a few unhappy customers. Please be reassured this little business has no intention of annoying their clients and are doing their best to try to get infrastructure in place so we can all have reliable Internet throughout the isles.

Indeed, I may have been one of the last (after all the cost and effort of installing satellite, I couldn't bear to change again) but I am also now a Cloudnet user, so I will see what issues you are experiencing, if it is a technical problem.

Please know there are issues, other than technical, that can play havoc with your reception, check out the Cloudnet site for advice, it may even be YOUR tech at fault! Anyways, given they are keen to ensure a workable system before charging for services, I do ask you all to please be patient and also realise that what they are doing is a huge thing, that involves a lot of man power, it's not just plugging boxes into sockets.

I'm not being paid for all this PR stuff, but as I have come to know this company as real people more than Customer Services at BT or Europasat, I would like to see this local business thrive, just as I hope my own local business might too.

NATURAL HISTORY SIGHTINGS ALEXANDRA WRIGHT, BRECKAN



Photos taken from our North Ronaldsay Natural History Facebook group, everyone welcome



Meadow coral, 14/10/2020. Sandra Tulloch

Leopard slug 09/11/2020 at Westness.



Angle shades moth, Bird Obs, 18/10/2020 Sara Macias Rodriguez



A pipe fish, washed up at Westness 25/10/2020

SCIENCE WEEKEND IN MARCH



Good news! we have been awarded £2,000 funding by British Science Week to hold a Science Weekend event (some time between 5 and 14 March) and follow-on activities. The Science Weekend last year was quite memorable, as it was the last time we were able to all get together for a community event before Covid descended.

It's hard to picture what March will be like this year - I can't imagine that we will be able to have the same sort of indoor events or speakers from south as last year. However, we can still plan outdoor and online activities.

The theme for this year's weekend is "Innovation", so if anyone has any ideas for the weekend or questions, please get in touch. Alexandrawright70@gmail.com

2020 has been a year like no other with this awful pandemic. However, for those cooped up in cities, deprived of normal freedoms, life has to be worse than it is for those who live in such an elemental place as North Ronaldsay. There are, of course, restrictions here too and life is not as it was, but comparably it is indeed a good place to be at this time. Alas, this year there are to be no get-togethers like the Harvest Home etc. For this reason, I wish to share with you my recollection of a very special week-long celebration held on the island twenty years ago - at the time of the turn of the century, when many had chosen NR as the place to be then.

It started with carols
in the kirk
on the 26th.
No, it didn't !
It started with the booking up
of the 8-seater Loganaire plane -
to and from, to fit in with personal
plans
and global living -
[and with Santa for the children on
Christmas Eve']
But then, it did start with carols
in the kirk
on the 26th.
Many came
and while the carols were sung,
loved ones from by-gone days
passed, projected across the white-
cloth screen,
and, intermingled with the singing,
it felt as though those gone were
there,
present, loved again, like the carols
of Christmas.
Moved, detached and joyful, the
congregation left.
It was a good beginning.

The 27th and the Memorial Hall was
decorated -
the Community Centre had been
already,
low hung bands of colour drawing
the high place warmly in
and down.

And on the 28th folk gathered
to see select photographs
contributed by each household
and beamed up,
before tea and a chat
that
continued, for many, till the small
hours in the Burrian Inn.

An ingenious idea!
The beach clean up
On the 29th.
Packs covering stretches of coast,
bagging plastic,
bags and bags,
removed to a sight near
the Old Beacon
for a bonfire pyre built high.
Work-worn workers gathered for soup
and a dram,
the job completed at Nouster
on the next morning.

On the 30th another gathering,
for the first showing of 'Island Song',
a powerful, evocative video,
strangely enhanced by the clouding of
flood damage,
reflecting decades of island life,-
seemed magical and unreal.
Could such a place , unique as this,
have ever really been ?
So much life
- greatly enjoyed.

On Hogmany, at dark, the bonfire was lit
by the oldest able man and woman,
near to the softly floodlit ancient
beacon.
Photographers climbed the lighthouse
- tallest in the country - to snap the
scene.
Figures, silhouetted by the flames,
moved back and fore,
as hosts of fireworks burst above.
It rained, but the wind fanned the fire
seaward for hours and hours.

At the Centre hot punch, buffet table
and dancing
till, in the middle of a reel,
all was hushed.
The wireless crackled and all listened
As the bells from London chimed out
our old year
our 20th century.
New Millenium greetings began and
the dance went on,
till 'Auld Lang Syne'.
First-footing of the houses,
[would take some days],
torchlight, casualties in the mud,
Merry Dancers in the sky,
and many voices.

But, on New Year's day at three,
more than fifty danced, linked
together,
around the single standing stone,
after the chanted recitation
and shared drink was done -
[a drink shared even with the stone].

In the same way
as the Celebration began,
it ended,
on the 2nd-

in the kirk -
backward through shadows and
candlelight,
the peoples of the past,
captured while at daily tasks
smiled out from the white-cloth
screen,
while "How great thou art" was sung,
in faltering voice as hearts yearned
for what had been.

Visitors music brought in
disturbed the atmosphere.
Sax played with cornet, flute with
fiddle
and soprano voices sang clear.
An organist played to lead the singing
till finally the kirk emptied to the
ringing
of bagpipes from the balcony.
"What a perfect cap-stone this must
be," said one American voice.

That night there was a storm -
125mph recorded there.
Some structural damage,
sheaves blown everywhere.
The plane came out in the morning
- filled up - but had to try,
more that one time,
to lift its load upwards
into the windy sky.

{I wrote this as a record of our time in North
Ronaldsay for the Millenium when the
population more than doubled and the island
had no air or sea connections for about a week. It
was a very memorable time - a feeling of being
cut off from the world with only those who were
there on that tiny island, a feeling of
timelessness, at a very significant time.}

Jean T (Verracott NR/Manora Stromness)

OUR FIRST WESTNESS SUMMER JACK STRAW, BRECKAN



So here we are in the darkest depths of the year once again. To me, the whole of this unsettling year of 2020 has sped by like no other. The main reason for this acceleration of time for me is that at the beginning of April, Alex and I decided that we should follow our hearts and buy the beautiful croft of Westness on the north end of the island. Whilst the first Covid lockdown was getting underway, we were full of excitement and anxiety concerning our purchase.

On 29 May, Westness became ours. The day was bright and bonnie, so we drove up the island to Westness and walked around the buildings and ground with George Seatter. Whilst we were walking round, I realised that there was a good deal of tidying up to be done around the house and outbuildings and that I was in for a busy summer.

The very next day I went up and got started by clearing out the old kitchen, and over the next five months I was tidying at Westness nearly every day. As I worked away, the sun shone, the seals sang and the fulmars flew gracefully up and down the line of the sea wall. I was greatly encouraged by the folk of the island who called at Westness regularly to check on my progress and to offer much appreciated words of support. I kept at it, sometimes up there until 11 pm on those glorious sunlit summer evenings. George was extremely helpful throughout the whole five months of the initial tidy-up, and I was truly amazed by his knowledge of many items found at Westness, and by the stories which went with the items.

Among George's best finds were a wooden stamp used for marking sacks of meal from the croft, the stamp read "TT" on one side for Tammie Tulloch of Westness and "NR" on the other for North Ronaldsay. George also found a genuine message in a bottle which had been flung into the Atlantic in the 1980s by a scientist who was studying ocean currents.



Throughout the whole summer, even though the work was hard, my spirits were always lifted by the natural beauty of the land, foreshore, sea, birds and seals of the Westness area. The months flashed by, and before long it was mid-October already. I was just feeling pleased with progress when Alex informed me that Johnny Westness was coming up to North Ronaldsay for the weekend from his home in Kirkwall. John (who was born and bred at Westness) kindly agreed to come down to Westness to tell us the names of the fields and outbuildings. He came over on a sunny Sunday October afternoon and spent a good three hours telling us the names of everything and various interesting stories. This was a very special and memorable afternoon for us.



John O'Westness

Over the years to come, Alex and I intend to manage Westness so that it benefits the flora and the wildlife (birds, invertebrates, eels) of the area.

We hope that lots of folk will continue to call in to see us and to enjoy the beauty of Westness. We cannot think of anywhere else on the planet that we would rather be.



REMEMBERING MARY TULLOCH AND HAPPY DAYS AT ANTABRECK ELLA HENDERSON, STROMNESS



Mary with the three bairns Ella, Inga, Rognvald

Written on the back:

"This was taken in spring almost a year ago but is really the best I have of them. The girl in the background keeps house for me while I am in the school. Ivy"

It was a Sunday morning and they were going to Sunday school, Mary was possibly going home to her family, since Ella has no memory of Mary going to the kirk with them. Possibly 1940 or 1941. Ronald/Rognvald was too big for the trike, but grabbed it as a prop because Inga had her barrow and Ella took her pram.

To honour the memory of Mary Tulloch of Sandback, I would like to add to what her niece, Jean Tulloch, contributed to the previous newsletter, by sharing with you how her presence had an influence on our lives throughout the years of the Second World War. Mary came to live with us, a family of five, thus making a household of six. She had left school and had her 14th birthday a few days after the Declaration of War which was to impact on how lives were to be lived, much like Covid-19 is doing today.

To view Mary through early childhood memories rather than from the altered awareness that comes with old age is revealing, and to recall Mary, who actually spent most of her growing-up years as part of our family at Antabreck, is difficult. Mary was fun, Mary was kind, Mary was with us from early morning until bedtime, Mary put meals on the table, and cleared them away. She was only just 14 and just finished school. Inga, my little sister, had just had her second birthday; I was three and a half, and felt myself to have part-ownership of my father's new tractor which arrived on my third birthday in February 1939; our older brother, Rognvald, was soon to be six and in his second year at school.

We were to live together from some time in August 1939 until October 1946 when we moved to Rendall. Mary grew up in that time having had a huge influence on our formative years. To highlight the passage of time, I'll share one of my memories of Rognvald, late in that last summer at Antabreck, asking Mary if he could go and take from her room two Craven A cigarettes for himself and a teenage girl who was a guest in the house. He was now well on his way through the KGS in Kirkwall.

My earliest memory of Mary was on, I suspect, my mum's first day back at school and Mary's first day in sole charge of the house and two small girls - I remember her rescuing Inga from her precarious perch on top of the clock in the middle of the mantelpiece. Having finished her nap, Inga had cleverly arranged the drawers of the dressing table to make steps up which to climb. It was Inga's first climbing adventure, but certainly not her last. In fact, for safety's sake - and for Mary's peace of mind - she was sent to school well before five.

My mother Ivy Johnston, an Orcadian born in Sandwick, came to North Ronaldsay in 1923 straight from training college to be an assistant teacher in the school. When she married Roy Scott of North Manse in July 1932, she had to stop teaching. All women teachers had to stop teaching when they married. On the outbreak of war, they were needed once more so Ivy, my mum, now Mrs Scott, was appointed head mistress to the North Ronaldsay Public School. In order to resume teaching, Mum needed someone to look after the children and help run the house. Fortunately Mary was good at both and had come to live in the attic above the kitchen, to get to know the children and become familiar with the housework before she was left in full charge.

Our father too was often away from Antabreck with his new tractor to help people, when he was not working on his own farm. So into our lives came God Bless Johnnie to attend to outdoor chores at Antabreck. He too was a teenager, and I am sure helped Mary keep an eye on Inga and me in our pre-school years. Both were our friends then and remained so always. Inga and I grew up believing that they liked playing games "wi peedie bairns". Until quite recently I believed that most Orkney bairns of our vintage grew up saying Bonnie Words (a little prayerful verse) at the end of every day. In our family at the end of our day, any rushing noisily up and down the long corridor was permitted for only so long before our father, in a quiet confidential tone, would say: "Mind on, if you want Mummy tae tuck you in and hear your Bonnie Words, you'll need to calm doon". We were trained.

Each of us had our own little verse but also we had a list of people and things that we felt we would like God to bless. With luck, it was a method of lengthening the time Mum spent with us. Many years later when we were students, most likely in an airport waiting room, Inga, in response to a comment from me, said, "No, not that Mary - our Mary - God Bless Mary." That was how, forever after, we referred to those two who had made our early childhoods such fun. Johnnie left to work on a farm in Sanday after a couple of years, but remained in touch... never ever to be confused with any other Johnnie.



Ella, Inga, Rognvald and their parents Roy and Ivy. The photo, and the next one, were taken at the New Manse. The occasion was a bring-and-buy sale to help fund the War effort

Mary's presence in our lives gave us much more than a reassuring background with her cheery character and her competent efficiency. Now I marvel at her ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Roy and Ivy had totally changed two independent but joined-together old traditional Orkney-style but, ben and closets into one long-house of many rooms, with two steep staircases giving access to four attic rooms which could serve as bedrooms. Adding a corridor running the length of the house created a further two self-contained rooms.

The house welcomed guests, be they relatives, friends or strangers - or even a newly appointed assistant teacher in the person of Mr J D Mackay who was given the room next door to the but-end kitchen. My dad hastily made many bookshelves to accommodate his vast number of books, which over the years (Spring 1942 until after the war ended) added whole new worlds to our lives. To be allowed to visit him in his room was a special delight. So now we were a household of seven with frequent other interesting visitors. Our growing-up years were hugely enriched by what we learned from riveting discussions round Antabreck's kitchen table. That continued down the years, I am glad to say. Mary coped with all this extra work, which every now and again included a new but always interesting stranger to occupy an attic, which added great excitement to our lives, the occasional present too, and conversations about things beyond our imagination.

Local people dropped by, as did the airmen stationed in Holland House, which must have brought some light relief into Mary's life with their chats and singing of wartime songs. I have memories of falling asleep to outbursts of laughter and the sound of conversations. War songs such as "Coming in on a wing and prayer" or "My bonnie lies over the ocean" lulled us to sleep. It was wartime. Mines went off quite often and quite dramatically. On one occasion when I was not well enough to go to school, a

mine went off around midday. Mary had been in the scullery at the sink, in the early stages of preparing vegetables for making soup. All this she quickly transferred to my bedside to allay my fears.

We yarned away. I revealed to her that I had been reading about Pip and the Convict from a book of short extracts from literature. The mine had gone off at the tensest moment when unsuspecting Pip was about to be confronted by the convict. I am still not sure whether my shock from the mine or the confrontation in the prose of Dickens was the greater shock. Mary and I had a good laugh over it, but it was a long time before I was to read any more Dickens.

Maimie and Lottie were our nearest neighbours and very first friends. Together we played very good "Let's pretend" games, played outdoors day after day. We would go and ask Mary to make us "a chaummy piece" to stave off hunger. Sometimes if we were lucky, we could have drop-scones or buns baked by Mary. When Inga and I were very peedie, and neither of us at school, baking days were the highlight of our lives. Much tasting of raw mixtures went on. Mary never complained that we might be ruining her measurement of quantities. However did Mary judge the temperatures of that old kitchen range? Anyway, Maimie, Lottie and I, with energy levels restored, would continue with our explorations and even went to inspect the progress of the growth of a neighbour's field-grown vegetables, a never-to-be-repeated experience. We would dawdle home from school making daisy chains or watch, with silent rapt attention, bees doing their exploring .

One afternoon, we parted company with Maimie and Lottie, leaving Inga and me to wander on a bit further until Antabreck came in sight. As soon as it did, Mary came rushing out, waving her hands in the air and loudly shouting: "The waar's ower, hurrah!" over and over again, as loud as loud could be . Off came our schoolbags, off to be flung ahead of us so we could run our fastest. We turned left at the first entrance, to run diagonally across Purtabreck's very green field strewn with bright yellow dandelions 'till we reached where the two dykes met at the top of the road to Antabreck. Mary was there to help us climb quickly over the wall. The three of us went wild with joy in front of Antabreck, shouting as loud as we could, our good news to the world....."Hurrah...hurrah.....the waa'rs ower ,THE WAAR'S OWER HURRA H". I can hear the sounds of North Ronaldsay ringing in my ears right now.....but know not how to put them into print. We danced and laughed and ran around with glee. I feel sure that Inga and I would have mentioned the end of Hitler for whom we had planned many possible ways of ending his existence. That was our oft recollected and unforgettable VE day.



Ella, Inga and Rognvald, 1939

There are many more memories of our adventures and wanderings and explorations, of picnics, of wartime concerts and so much more, but ultimately I can do no better than encapsulate a North Ronaldsay childhood in a quotation from one of my coevals, a word loved and much used by my father. Recently she said, "I'll always feel privileged to have been born and brought up in North Ronaldsay where we had such freedom and felt so safe and looked after and where there wis naething tae be faired o". To be able to say that of a wartime childhood in Britain is a privilege, and for the three bairns o' Antabreck, Mary was central to it all.

Coming back to Orkney and spending time reminiscing with Mary was always entertaining. Her concluding comments were invariably "Good days at Antabreck....happy days at Antabreck". Finally, to quote Inga again, and referring to our Bonnie Word title: "If anybody deserved God's blessing, surely it was 'our Mary' ".

COMMUNITY GARDENING PROJECT

A group of us would like to start a community gardening project on North Ronaldsay next year. We want this project to bring people together whilst also growing food for islanders. Our initial thoughts are to have Polycrubs, raised beds, a tool shed, a wildflower area, and a communal social area. We want to offer folk growing spaces in the raised beds and Polycrubs, and also run volunteer days and workshops to help people find out more about gardening. We hope that by sharing tasks and knowledge we can make growing vegetables easier, safer and fun for islanders of all ages.

We want this project to benefit our community and would really like for everyone to have the chance to be involved. In the coming months, we will be meeting with community groups and islanders to listen to ideas and suggestions for the community gardening project. If you have any ideas before these meetings, please speak to Alex, Sian or Olly if you see us, or write to us at The Schoolhouse, The Farmhouse or Breckan - or email at opwgibb@gmail.com, sytarrant@gmail.com or alexandrawright70@gmail.com. We look forward to hearing from you!

Some islanders have already some awareness of the project as we have been speaking to some experienced vegetable growers on the island. It has been a good way to start spreading the word, getting advice and working on building a support network around the project. The invaluable knowledge and experience of people on the island who have been growing their own vegetables for many years is a great asset and opportunity for us to learn, and we would love to get everyone involved.

The idea is to work together to benefit each other, us getting advice on what works and what doesn't on the island and for the islanders to be able to purchase products from us that haven't been successful, due to lack of space or professional growing facilities (if there's anything you're not able to grow yourselves, please let us know and we'll give it a go!). We are very grateful to Purtabreck, Upper Linnay and North Gravity for sharing their knowledge with us, and we look forward to keep chatting to more people on the island and share the experience and enjoyment of growing local products.

Challenge

We'd like to share a bit of knowledge regarding growing vegetables on the island and show what a challenge it can be, due to the harsh weather conditions.

A common theme that came up while speaking to the vegetable growers was pests. There are a few pests that affect growing of fruit and vegetables on the island, but the most worrying these days is the diamondback moth (*Plutella xylostella*), sometimes called the cabbage moth. This small moth is a migrant species and had been recorded in small numbers in the past, but it became a pest in the UK four years ago after a very large migration from continental Europe.

Since then, it has caused a lot of damage to brassica crops (cabbage, cauliflower, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, turnip, etc). The adult moths lay their eggs on the leaves of the plants and the newly hatched caterpillars burrow into the foliage to feed, then come out onto the leaf surface as they grow larger and cause characteristic "windowpane" damage (see figure 2). The peak time of their arrival is June and the most effective way to avoid them damaging the plants seems to be to cover them with fleece to avoid the adults laying their eggs in the first place.



Figure 1. Adult Diamondback moth



Figure 2. "Windowpane" damage

THOSE LEGENDARY LITTER-PICKERS OLLY GIBB, THE SCHOOLHOUSE



Chris

Rolling in from distant shores, plastic bottles lie arrogantly nestled in our tranquil coves and sandy bays. Toothbrushes, tyres and crisp packets blemish our beaches and taint our shores. The silent war waged by sea litter is one of mindless attrition. Mass consumption and mass disposal. For a year now, our laments and cries of hopelessness have been lost in the gales as we stumble along beaches riddled with rubbish, fearing the inevitable desecration of this holy coast.

But now, thanks to a brave few - a lucky few - the tides in this war are changing. Whispers that started softly as a late spring breeze have rallied and gathered to a roaring mid-winter battle cry that sounds every Sunday as the hordes of litter-picking heroes charge onto the shores to defend their lands. Any litter unlucky enough to be on our coast now quivers in fear as wellies both small and large march wholeheartedly towards it, impassioned on their weekly crusade for justice. Cheered on by seals and birds we will doggedly litter-pick until we can litter-pick no more.

Since our brave warriors have started, they have been collecting roughly 30 kgs of rubbish a week - over 100 kgs in November! With the average European person producing 31 kgs of rubbish a year, the group are on track to becoming more plastic-neutral in just a few months. We are storing this plastic so it can be recycled, using shredding and extruding equipment, into exportable products such as fence posts and plant pots.

We gather every Sunday at a time and place dependent on tide and weather, usually confirmed via Residents WhatsApp. Despite the intense write-up, it's very relaxed and sociable, and ideally ends with hot drinks and baked goods. If you are keen to get involved - we'd love to hear from you!

The team so far has been helped by folk of all ages and an enthusiastic dog. Also if you'd like us to visit one of your favourite sections of coast for a clean-up near you, then please get in touch and let us know. We will continue to litter-pick until Spring, and then proceed with advice from the local bird experts to ensure the least possible disturbance for our bird life.

Opwgibb@gmail.com 07717 352972 alexandrawright70@gmail.com 07809 770082



Ezri, Phoebe and Robin



“We will litter-pick on the beaches, we will litter-pick in the coves, we will litter-pick in the setting sun and howling gales, we shall litter-pick on our island, whatever the cost.”

NEWS FROM THE BIRD OBSERVATORY

DARYL MCLEOD

It's been a surprisingly busy Autumn for the guest house at the Bird Observatory, but things have well and truly wound down for the year. The Obscafé is still open as normal for anyone in passing needing to escape the howling North Ronaldsay winter! It's always worth calling down in advance, though, as most of our staff have now settled into their own cottages elsewhere on the island for the winter.

Now that we are into the winter timetable for transport, shop opening times are a little different. We are now open 12-2 pm every day. With the freight plane arriving on Tuesday mornings now, we should have time (in theory) to restock the shop before opening. So, the late opening (12-4) on Tuesdays will no longer apply. We do our best to get everything onto the shelves as quickly as possible, especially when the plane is delayed. But if you can hang tight until a little later, our staff always appreciate the space to unpack!

Do remember to ask if there are any items you can't see, or would like us to order in for you! Feedback is always welcome to keep the shop as useful to our island as possible. We are also lucky this year to be complemented by the new Easting Road Store, where Chris and Charlotte are filling the well-needed niche of hardware and crofting supplies. So, be sure to drop by and support them in their goal to provide better resilience for our community.

A note about Fish 'N' Chips Friday

We've been delighted with the success of our fish and chips Fridays this year, and are hoping to keep them going over the winter. To keep things viable, we'll be scaling back to just one delivery trip between 6.30 and 7. If that doesn't suit, there will still, of course, be the option to collect. A tasty supper for you and some winter employment for our staff - so please do keep those orders coming in!

We are still planning to run the occasional curry night. And let us know if you'd be interested in branching out to Chinese!

tel: 01857 633200
email: enquiries@nrbo.org.uk



Eyebrowed Thrush, photo by George Gay

Bird Observatory Autumn Round-up George Gay, Bird Observatory



Turkestan Shrike, photo by George Gay

It's been one of the best autumns in recent history at the Observatory, with plenty of good birds for us to shout about. It all started in August with a Turkestan Shrike at Ancum found by Dante, in what would turn out to be a prolific autumn of finding rarities for him. The bird spent two days between Verracott and Ancum before departing. The Shrike was followed up by an Eastern Subalpine Warbler and Fea's Petrel on 30 August, with both birds appearing within minutes of one another.

A Baird's Sandpiper found on 3 September spent the most part of September hanging around the lochs at the north end of the island and was joined by our second Pectoral Sandpiper of 2020 on the 12th. Next up was Britain's fifth Semipalmated Plover found on



Baird's Sandpiper, photo by George Gay

the Links, a very tricky identification challenge, but the Obs team stepped up to it with a little help from those more familiar with this North American counterpart to our Ringed Plover. A Great Shearwater followed in the coming days, and we weren't left waiting long until Dante struck again with a Red-throated Pipit at Brides, one of at least four birds that occurred on the island throughout September and October.

October would be the main event, and it started off in ridiculous style with the island's second record of White's Thrush trapped in Holland, only for another Siberian mega thrush to join the list in the shape of an Eyebrowed Thrush at Waterhouse. This also sparked our first and only twitch of the year, albeit a small and socially distanced one. A Pallas's Grasshopper Warbler was found by David Roche visiting from nearby Papa Westray on 8 October, and a Buff-bellied Pipit followed a couple of days later on the North Links, where it spent a couple of days after an initial bunk that had a few observers panicking!

Late migrants this year have included a Woodlark that's spent most of November hanging around in an Obs crop field, and a Yellowhammer at Longar which was only our second of the year. Iceland Gulls on the Links and at Bridesness have begun to give a wintery feel to proceedings. Perhaps less surprisingly, the Green-winged Teal is back on Gretchen, where it will no doubt spend the winter!



Buff-bellied Pipit, photo by George Gay

VIETNAMESE ADVENTURES AFTER LOCKDOWN

LOUIS CRAIGIE, LOCHEND



At my birthday party in Dong Xuan Market

to Journalist Day on 21 June. A day I'd never heard of before but it turned out to be quite a big function in Hanoi. Many flowers had to be prepared and presented onto a board designed by the florist for each journalist company in Vietnam. Some of the staff worked several days and nights only getting an hour or two sleep per a day. I saw one girl fall asleep while she was working. We all were glad when our large order was complete!

My birthday, being a florist and fishing

I celebrated my first birthday abroad at the end of May with Nga and a few friends in the old quarter part of Hanoi. It was a grand night with traditional Mien Tron, chicken, a variety of vegetables and beer being served. It was pouring with rain during the meal, but just after we had finished, the rain stopped and we all went to get some ice cream and then spent time chatting away while walking around Hoan Kiem Lake. Nga had made Coconut Jelly (Thạch Dừa), while I had made some Green Tea Cupcakes to share with everyone.

For a couple of nights I helped out at the flower shop called Lux Flowers where Nga's sister Ngoc works. They needed help during the time leading up



A few of the Roses I helped plant earlier now growing around wet sand to help keep them cool

We often go to the Old Quarter during the evenings by motorbike. They close part of the street down at the weekends, so we often park our motorbike with our good friend Hanh who lives there with his wife Oanh. Then we all go for a walk through Dong Xuan market before finishing the evening off with drinks at a cafe and occasionally karaoke which is very popular in Vietnam! Sometimes we go fishing with Hanh in various lakes in Hanoi. There's a variety of fish in the lakes but commonly caught by folk is a type of catfish - very strong and some are very big. I so far have not caught anything, although I had a couple of bites. I'd never fished before but I enjoyed the experience.

Eating ice cream and climbing trees!



Coconut Jelly

For a few days we also had Nga's youngest sister called Tuyet, nicknamed Bong, staying with us. She was recovering from a motorbike accident after injuring her knee and her head. After she recovered, we all spent an evening in the Old Quarter where Bong especially wished to visit the famous Trang Tien where they sell Kem, the Vietnamese word for ice cream. I also got to taste fresh durian fruit for the first time. It's quite foul-smelling but tastes pretty good. Its taste is rather acquired though. Be careful when preparing as the whole skin is covered with sharp spikes!



Durian

Another weekend we visited Nga's friend Yen who lives in the outskirts of Hanoi. Her family have a large garden where they grow avocados, lemongrass, grapefruit, jackfruit, guava, ginger and a lot of longan trees. We all helped harvest some of the longan fruit and bought some to take back with us, as the family sell most of their produce. Long time since I'd climbed any trees! I wasn't quite as nimble as the locals.



Longans

Weekend in the Vietnamese countryside

During the times I'm in Vietnam we visit Nga's parents once or twice a month. We often help out around the farm as well as with preparing food and cooking meals. I ate snake for the first time which tasted surprisingly good, although it was very crunchy, shall we say, with the edible small bones. The meat tasted like a cross between chicken and fish. Another time I ate some crickets.

Food is often prepared about four or five hours in advance for the meal, as there are many dishes. After the meal there is always fruit served. The women traditionally wait till everyone is finished before they tidy up and wash the dishes. While most men tend to sit down and drink green tea. It's also common for folk to have a nap after lunch for a couple of hours, especially in the summer time when it's dangerously too hot to work outside.



Longan Tree



Grains of Rice



Fields of Rice ready for harvest



Combine Harvester with tracks



Rice drying in the hot sun

I quite enjoyed spending time in the countryside helping out wherever I can. Whether it's with transplanting papaya seedlings, shovelling wet sand around dozens of pots of roses to help keep them cool or constructing an enclosure for ducks and geese. I also got to experience the rice harvest for the first time. Everything was done by hand in the fields till around eight years ago when the first machines came along. Nowadays rice is harvested all by a small combine. There are usually about two or three machines shared with folk around a couple of villages which are hired out for the two harvests per year.

Short trip to the capital of Vietnamese royal cuisine



Nem Lui - pork on a stick of Lemongrass dipped in a peanut sauce

Towards the end of July I and Nga went on a short holiday to a city called Hue in central Vietnam. The city used to be the old Imperial capital till as late as 1945 and saw heavy fighting during the Vietnam War. Today it's a popular tourist destination, its main attractions being the old imperial city with the large citadel overlooking the beautiful Perfume River. Hue food is perhaps the best you can get in Vietnam - dishes such as Bun Bo Hue (Beef Noodles), Nem Lui (pork on a stick of Lemongrass dipped in a peanut sauce), Banh Khoai (Vegetarian pancake) and, possibly my favourite, Banh Bôt Lọc (tapioca dumplings made with shrimp and pork served wrapped up in a banana leaf).



Banh Khoai -Vegetarian pancake served with a peanut sauce



Banh Beo - Sticky Rice cakes topped with shrimp flakes, crispy pork skin served with a fish chilli sauce

They are then eaten unwrapped and dipped in a small bowl of fish sauce which also included a little sugar, chilli and vinegar. There is less meat consumed in Hue compared to other parts of Vietnam and portions are smaller. More work I found goes into the presentation. I think it must stem from when food in the city had to be prepared carefully and presented decoratively for the Emperor and his family. There are also many royal tombs you can visit and the large pagoda called Thien Mu, where I and Nga visited by borrowing a couple of bicycles from our hostel to cycle there (Nga's bicycle I noted being made by Land Rover).



Banh Bot Loc - Tapioca Dumplings made with shrimp and pork served wrapped up in a banana leaf.

Arriving back home

I arrived back home on 25 August after quite a stressful and busy time of organising bookings, then changes to times and dates and even changing airlines; then having to rebook and then they changed their schedule too. Everything had to be organised all at once, including getting a test done for Covid 19 within a few hours before departure. We spent several hours waiting for the results. This was followed by having to get the results translated into English.

My journey back home was an unusual and strange one, with planes flying practically only a third full, especially the flight to Dubai, being handed a sanitising kit and the service being less active on the planes. Also I found many places to eat at the airports were closed or their menu was very limited. Before I arrived home, I spent time with Joni in Aberdeen where we had a meal together at her flat. I gave her some Vietnamese snacks before I continued my journey back to Orkney. After a total of six separate planes and three and half days of travelling, I finally made it back home.



Small leaving party at the flower shop with friends

After being away from home for over five months, it was strange at first being back. The main thing that really struck me was the absent drone of constant noise from vehicles outside my window 24/7. It was such a pleasure to hear more natural sounds like the sea, the seals and the birds. And it's also great to be back working in the garden. I also made five jars of peanut butter, using peanuts from Nga's parents' garden and cooked some Vietnamese food. Still have some Vietnamese snacks left which I'm trying to save to make them last longer!

Recently I've been baking in preparation for Christmas, including experimenting with a few new recipes. Not sure when I'll be back in Vietnam again, but I do know I'm to be making a wedding anniversary cake for my friend Hanh and his wife Oanh. His wife especially likes cakes. It'll likely be made some time after the actual wedding anniversary though!

NORTH RONALDSAY RIVLINS

Rivlins are the historical footwear of the Northern Isles, of which barely a memory remains in Orkney, but slightly more in Shetland. There is one pair of rivlins in the Orkney Museum, and work was done some years ago on their manufacture. They were traditionally made of untanned leather, and agricultural workers sometimes received half an ox's hide as part of their remuneration to make footwear for their family.

North Ronaldsay had its own tradition of rivlins made of sheepskin. There are still some memories of these from the middle of the last century, and it must be a matter of some urgency to record as many as possible that remain. The tradition was rehearsed in a Rivlin Making as recently as 1996, and it is hoped that this event (an important memory in itself) can be a useful stepping stone into the past.

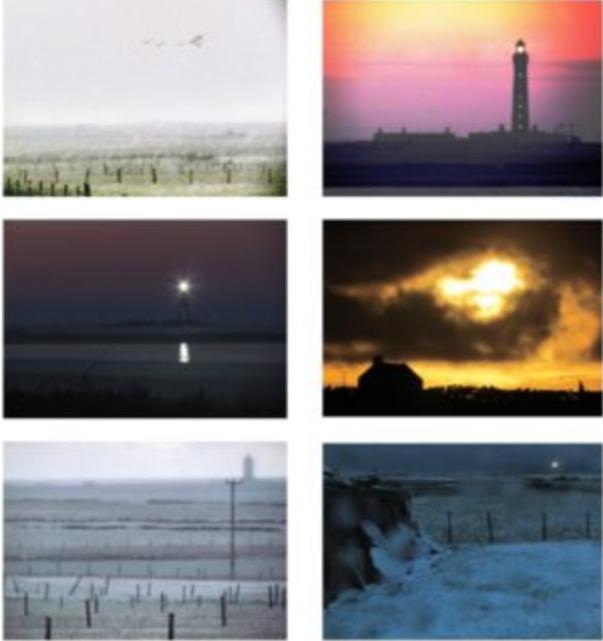
Accordingly it is proposed that two projects should be run using some funding which is available to the North Ronaldsay Sheep Festival from the OIC Culture Fund.

The **History Project** would be aiming to capture and record any memories from the early or mid 20th century, and track down any other evidence of North Ronaldsay rivlins. This should be compared with what is known of Orkney Mainland rivlins and formulated into an illustrated talk which can be delivered at the North Ronaldsay Sheep Festival at various times in the future.

The **Craft Project** would use the outputs of the History Project and other inputs in the development of a rivlin-making workshop which would be run at the North Ronaldsay Sheep Festival at various times in the future.

For further information, please contact one of: Heather Woodbridge, heatherwoodbridge@hotmail.co.uk or Robert Brewis, robert.brewis@rgbsa.co.uk

North Ronaldsay in winter
A set of 6 cards with envelopes
with photography by Sue Mara



size: A7 (70x105 mm) inside message: "Season's greetings" (also available blank, to order)
£1 each/pack of 6 - £5/pack of 12 - £10
5% of sales donated to the Marine Conservation Society
+ £1 p&p North Ronaldsay: free delivery Kirkwall: collection by arrangement
contact: sue_mara@hotmail.co.uk



Framed photography

A great gift - any of these North Ronaldsay images mounted in a frame 17.5 x 22.5 cm - choose from grey/black/white/wood (subject to availability)

£17 + £3 p&p (5% to marine charity)
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GREAT BALLS OF FIRE

BY JIMMY FIRESTARTER



I've been asked about my recycling. The main reason I am doing it is to make up for a lifetime of destroying the world for no good reason. Here is one example (of many). After finding some gardening and care work, I swore I would never go back into factory and warehouse work, but I needed more money to move to North Ronaldsay, so I sold my soul and went to work in a chocolate factory packing 'Minion' Easter eggs. If you've never worked in a chocolate factory, readers, then don't!

The first wave of depression hits when you walk through the door and realise, this is NOT what I was led to believe. Zero chocolate rivers. Zero oompa lumpas. Zero fat kids stuck in suction tubes (though I was told about the time one of the regulars got his hand caught in the canteen vending machine while trying to steal a Mars bar - pretty funny! If only his name had been Augustus Gloop!). Chocolate factories are in fact more like Harry Potter chambers. Pallets and pallets of boxes stacked in aisles of racking that reach up into the ceiling and stretch off into the gloom.

The second wave of depression hits when you are placed beside a conveyor belt and shown your job for the next eight hours. You look at the clock. The second hand seems to tick by once every ten seconds. You look at the conveyor. You look back at the clock which now seems to have stopped. You sigh and look back at the conveyor. If you make the mistake of looking along a conveyor belt, you see people either side ripping open boxes and throwing cardboard into a skip. They take out flat-pack delivery boxes and assemble them. Further down the line you see people ripping open boxes and throwing cardboard into a skip. They take out and assemble flat-pack shop display boxes to go inside the delivery boxes. Further down the line you see people ripping open

boxes and throwing cardboard into a skip as they take out trays and trays of Easter eggs to place on the conveyor. Beyond that, fork-lift trucks bringing in pallet after pallet of boxes!

The trick with production line work is to always look down. You now have two options. You can play the counting game, (which gets boring after three), or you can summon all of your kung fu mind mastery skills, tear your mind away from this nightmare, create a 'world of pure imagination' and think happy thoughts like Peter Pan. Even the strongest mind guru can't hold out forever though, and as sure as the incoming tides, the factory setting seeps back into your retinas. You feel a pull in the centre of your mind, trying to twist your head to look along the conveyor, as if the belt has a demonic presence of its own.

A seasoned professional can summon the last of his mental strength and use this 'gravitational malice' to slingshot his eyes past the conveyor in the vain hope of glimpsing a fire exit symbol, (a man running through a door to freedom), but nine times out of ten, your gaze will land on the wall. The one with the clock. The clock that is now spinning backwards so fast the numbers have reached melting point and started to drip. All hope is lost. With the unforgiving pull of a black hole, your eyes are drawn back to the conveyor, circle once or twice around the event horizon, and then lock. The demon has you pinned in its gaze.....

Staring along a moving conveyor has a strange effect. The stretched perspective combined with the contrast of the fixed and moving parts creates a 'parallax scrolling' feeling in your eyes (similar to looking sideways out of a car on a motorway and watching the scenery move by at different speeds). It becomes mesmerising. Your peripheral vision begins to fog and move inwards until a strange warp tunnel appears and all you can see is the conveyor belt. Suddenly everything ceases to exist... time... space... reality itself. There is nothing but you... hanging in the void... facing a demonic mouth spewing out legion after legion of mischievous yellow soldiers marching endlessly towards you. You blink and everything looks normal again...except...the boxes are blank. The minions have disappeared.

Your brain stutters: "Is it really over?".... "Where could they have gone?". Then you feel them, inside your mind, running around, flicking switches, pulling levers, pressing buttons they shouldn't. A million, a billion, a trillion voices call out your name. You know they are not real. You know you shouldn't answer... but you must. You gather all of your inner strength and in the centre of your mind's eye, you stand tall and shout in your most commanding voice: "What? What do you all want from me???". Their voices merge and in unison they cry out: "What are you doing with your life?" That's when you start to scream. That is also when a well-trained team leader (who senses

stock is about to get damaged) swoops in from behind and employs a special 'calming manoeuvre'. She places her hands on your shoulders in a comfortable but firm and controlling grip, steers you away from the conveyor and shuffles you off to the canteen to administer first aid in the form of coffee and wet paper towels.

The third wave of depression hits when you see the wrinkles on her skin. Not 'age' or 'bath' wrinkles, but wrinkles that look like her skin has not been pulled on tight enough. A cold dread fills your soul as you imagine the horror you are about to witness. Your subconscious takes over. You watch helplessly as your hands shoot out and start tearing at her flesh. The latex feels sickeningly clammy in your hands and each rip reveals more and more yellow. Sooooo much yellow! One more mighty tug and her whole human skin suit comes off... and then, you get that feeling. (If you have ever been faced by a 6-foot minion in real life, staring at you blankly in disbelief now that its cover has been blown, from its all-seeing googly eye, then you'll know the feeling I'm talking about.) That feeling that says my life path has just been defined with a crystal clarity so sharp it could slice an atom. They are among us! I have to wake people up!! I have to warn them!!!

Ok, so that last bit never happened, but you see where I'm going with this. A lifetime of watching pointless destruction and waste (through warp tunnels of despair) is enough to send anyone bonkers. (I thank my lucky minions I got out in time... "Hey, get away from that self-destruct button!"). This madness goes on daily, worldwide. People working like robots. I've worked in some places that just have a skeleton crew to make sure the machines don't malfunction (or rise up and take over!). Robots working like robots, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. A Global-Planet-Destroying-Mega-Machine of Mass Production/Destruction, churning out crud from its chimneys and nonsense from its loading bays. A machine that doesn't need to eat or sleep or walk its dog. When faced with these overwhelming odds, it's clear that recycling can, at best, slightly slow down deforestation and reduce waste but unless we all stop buying rubbish we don't need, or force companies to make re-useable packaging, this insanity will continue.

There's not much to say about the recycling itself. I have been making firelighters from paper, cardboard and wax. They burn quite well and don't have a nasty chemical smell and I shred and soak cardboard and paper and squeeze it into burnable bricks and balls. I started with a brick press. It works pretty well but needs refilling a few times to make one brick. I tried making a bigger press from a rectangular sieve and it speeds things up, but until they dry, the bricks are too big to move easily without them breaking. I tried making logs by drilling holes in a plastic tube from the inside of the silage wraps and compacting it down with a tin can and a heavy metal pole. This works pretty well, but still only makes one log at a time.

The fireballs seem to be the easiest to make. Most of the water can be squeezed out by hand and they can be compacted like snowballs. They are a convenient size for wood burners with smaller doors and seem to burn quite well when they finally dry out. In summer it only takes three or four days of hot sun but at room temperature it takes a few weeks to dry them. A hydraulic press could create dry bricks but the water seems to help bond them together.

I am finding there is a delicate balance to recycling. Big machines and heaters and electricity for shredding and drying and compacting would speed up the process and make more bricks at a time, but if you put in too much energy, it defeats the whole purpose of recycling. (Some of the big recycling companies are almost as toxic to the environment as the rubbish they are trying to recycle). It's not yet financially viable for all the time and effort I have put in and it's a long slow process, but I am learning and perfecting as I go and at least it's a small step in the right direction. Also, it occurs to me that I can take people's rubbish, add water to it and sell it back to them (and I live right next to the sea!). This time next year, Rodney...

NOW AVAILABLE - SUGAR HOUSE FIRE BALLS!

Made by soaking waste cardboard and compressing in balls, then air-dried. Currently all made by one man!

Each fire ball burns for approximately 1-2 hours.

Available from Easting Road, North Ronaldsay store at £0.35 each or £1.75 per kilo (approximately 6 balls). Or buy online at www.eastingroadorkney.co.uk (search for "fire ball").



**WANTED:
A CROFT ON NORTH RONALDSAY!**

We are looking for a croft on North Ronaldsay that has a boundary with the sheep dyke. If you know of any possible options, or how to contact current owners, we'd be grateful to hear from you.

Thank you!
Olly and Sian, The Schoolhouse

opwgibb@gmail.com
07717 352972

sytarrant@gmail.com
07743 651348

WANTED: RECYCLATES

Card board and paper for recycling into fire balls. If you could take plastic off that would be great, but it is not essential.

Also looking for thick cardboard tubes from inside tin foil, cling film and baking paper rolls.

And old candles or wax.

Many thanks, James Boyden, Sugarhouse

TRAINING OPPORTUNITY

NRT has a small amount of funding available from donations and other fund raising to train North Ronaldsay islanders in the specific technique of NR Sheep Dyke building. The aim is to:

- have a team of conservation volunteers
- have people with dyke building experience available to help out during sheep festival
- be on hand if loads of dyke goes down
- be available if there's any paid dyke work.

The training will involve building Sheep Dyke to an appropriate height and standard, on completion of the training you will get paid £50.

Please get in touch with Alison at Lurand if you are interested.

NORTH RONALDSAY COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Chairman: Ian Deyell iandeyell369@btinternet.com Clerk: Sarah Moore northronalsayclerk@gmail.com

PLASTIC BENCHES

Applications wanted for provision of 2 concrete bases and installation of 2 plastic benches on said concrete bases around the new airport building

Dimensions of concrete base must be at least 1.5 x 1.5 metres and 75 mm thick each, finished level with top soil

Interested applicants should submit a quote to the Clerk in writing/by email by 14 January 2021

FOR SALE

3 RECYCLED METAL BENCHES

Interested applicants, please contact the Clerk with offers by 14th January 2021

To view, please contact David Scott
07731 780965/07879 696317



ROAD AGGREGATES

NRCC has set aside a budget for road aggregate.

Please submit applications to the Clerk by 14 January 2021, stating the type and quantity required

All aggregate from previous orders must be used before new applications will be considered

FOR SALE
MILLDAM AND BARRENHA, NORTH RONALDSAY



This registered croft includes a dwelling house which requires attention and adjoining outbuildings.

The croft land is all in grass extending to approximately 14.87 acres or thereby. The land is all surrounding the house.

The property is situated on the picturesque island of North Ronaldsay and enjoys views across farmland to the sea. The airfield, post office/shop and doctor's surgery are all nearby.

Offers over £75,000.

For further details, please contact:
Lows Solicitors-Estate Agents
5 Broad Street, Kirkwall, Orkney, KW15 1DH

Tel: 01856 873151 Web: www.lowsorkney.co.uk



NORTH RONALDSAY 2021 CALENDAR



The 2021 North Ronaldsay Community Fundraising Calendar is now on sale! This year's theme is "The Sheep on the Shore". The calendar is full of photos and information about our unique shoreline, its sheep, birds and the sheep dyke.

The calendar is available to buy in all three of the island shops, and also online at the Easting Road shop at: www.eastingroadorkney.co.uk/item/sheep-on-the-shore-2021-calendar

It costs £10 and, if required, £2 for postage and packing for UK deliveries. If you would like multiple or overseas orders, please contact me directly at alexandrawright70@gmail.com.

The proceeds from the calendar will go to providing equipment and safety kit for the North Ronaldsay Trust to be used to repair the North Ronaldsay Sheep Dyke. The kit will be available for use by the Sheep Dyke Warden, volunteers and the 2021 North Ronaldsay Sheep Festival.

Many, many thanks to all the people, both from North Ronaldsay and beyond, who helped create this calendar by providing beautiful images and fascinating articles.

**MY LOCKDOWN LIFE COMMUNITY ART PROJECT AND EXHIBITION
SUE TAYLOR, SOUTH GRAVITY**



Sue Taylor with the exhibition at Stromness Library

My Lockdown Life - a project of art work created by residents of North Ronaldsay - started in May and ran through the summer. The call-out was to make a still life composition of the objects, people and/or places that were helping people through lockdown.

Back in March, having all our social activities suddenly shut down was hard. Others were organising lovely things - like Mark's weekly quiz and Teigan's painted stone hunt - and I had this idea. I was excited to receive a total of 10 vibrant and interesting images, together with some accompanying texts. An exhibition of the My Lockdown Life pieces is now on display at the Bird Observatory.

I've also been working on persuading people on Mainland to offer us some exhibition space. After a few "no's", I had two "yes's" on the same day! So we're having showings of the artwork both in the large windows of the Ortak shop (temporarily empty) on Albert Street in Kirkwall (opposite the Brig and Co-op), and also in a large window at Stromness Library, starting on 4 December. Orcadian Print Centre have also given us a generous discount on a paper banner for the display.

Island residents were asked: What's keeping you going in lockdown on North Ronaldsay? What things are helping you each day get through these strange times? What's keeping you sane, and how would you show this in a picture?

Some islanders used the time to develop existing interests. "My guitar and making rhubarb wine kept me going through lockdown," said Jack. "I also read all 10 volumes of Compton Mackenzie's autobiography." Others enjoyed the chance to try something new. "Cross-stitch has been my passion for 35 years, but I've just learned to crochet from Youtube," explained Jenny.

A personal response, from Sarah, was her photograph of a homage to the war created on her living room wall, including a jigsaw. "The old man in it looks very much like my grandfather, and it really hit home for me," she said. "Our past is our past - we cannot hide from it, we can only learn from those that came before. The young men who went to war paid a far higher price than we could ever hope to understand."

And for some, just having a new discipline helped. "Producing a daily flower record, press and identification sheet has been great for giving a structure and purpose to my lockdown days," reflected Alex. "I felt like a Victorian plant collector, so added a vintage frame to my collage and used antiquated-looking fonts."

Thanks to all who took part, and I hope that everyone will enjoy seeing the exhibition, either here or on Mainland.



Maureen Johnstone



Ellie Taylor



Jack Straw



Olly Gibb



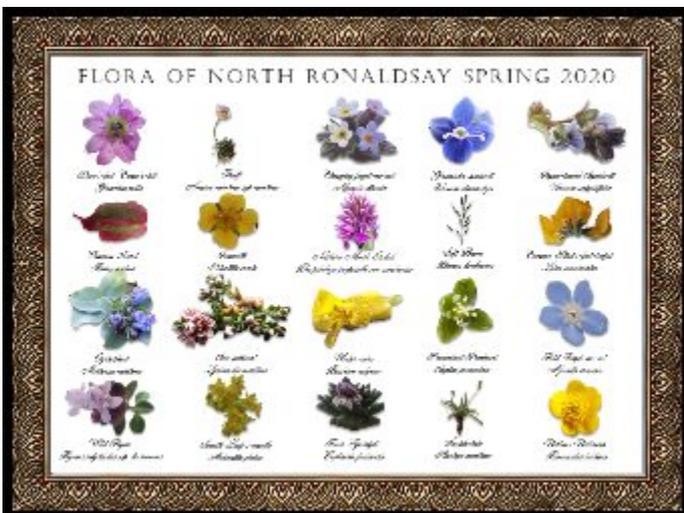
Jenny Moore



Teigan Scott



Helga Scott



Alex Wright



Sarah Moore