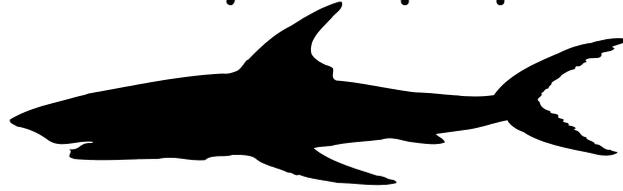


# "Roond About Birsay"

## News for and by the people of Birsay



Autumn 2013

Issue 43

---

### Editorial

Here goes once more with an attempt at a newsletter. It seems to be getting later in the year every time but this year I'll make the excuse that the weather has been so good I haven't had the time or the inclination to sit down and do it. Far better to be out cutting grass and such like or breaking your back digging up tatties, maybe? Anyhow, this summer has spoilt my usual rant about the weather, since everyone has got their harvest done, some for the second time this year since a lot of last year's crop wasn't cut until the first of this year. Did that mean you could have two Harvest Homes? Well, we'll see what comes now and keep our fingers crossed. By the time you are reading this, I expect the clocks will have gone back and it might all change.

**Johnny Johnston - Editor**

---

### Birsay Community Council

We have just been doing our usual things over the summer months. There are always groups asking for funds to help them with various things and we help where we can, for example, with money towards travel for going south for sports events and things like that.

Our main thing at the moment is still the provision of a small car park and community area at the Palace. This has been on-going for quite some time now, as anything involving land purchase and planning permission always does, but we are at last beginning to see the end of that part of it and hope to make a start very soon.

The Annual Tree Lighting ceremony, which is carried out by the combined Community Councils from Harray, Sandwick and Birsay, will take place in Dounby on Friday 6<sup>th</sup> December. This is always a popular event, and Santa will be at the Dounby School afterwards.

As always, let any of our Community Councillors know if you have anything you would like brought up.

We were most disappointed to discover an act of vandalism out at the Point of Buckquoy last weekend ( 26<sup>th</sup> Oct.) Some yobos had apparently held a firework party which involved throwing all the refuse bins over the shore. We do hope they enjoyed themselves.

**Johnny Johnston - Chairman**

## St Magnus Church Birsay Trust

### Windows

No, NOT the computer programme. Our new stained-glass window has been the subject of numerous appreciative comments in the visitors' book. Here are just a few: "Wonderful window and descriptive book." "Beautiful new window. Lovely interpretation" "The window is a great addition to the kirk" "Wonderful peace and exquisite windows" "Amazing window. Love the sea-pinks in it" There have even been a few visitors from Halifax, where Shona McInnes lives. One wrote: "The new window is superb, especially from Yorkshire" Another couple from South Yorkshire e-mailed Shona after getting back home, telling her how much they had enjoyed seeing the window. And no doubt it influenced the person whose comment on the church was: "A treasure in Birsay."

We have sold a considerable number of cards showing the window, and we plan to sell packets of ten or more in time for Christmas. Single cards are £1, but anyone who would like ten or more can have them for 75p each. Place your order with any of the trustees as soon as possible, please.

The window in the picture gallery was also badly in need of being replaced, and there we have gone for a simple etching of the Trust's logo, based on a design in Loveday McPherson's window. It lets in plenty of light, allowing people a good view of our growing collection of paintings, photographs etc. This year we have added a beautiful and unusual photograph of the church in winter, taken in the snow of 2012 by Beverley Baker, formerly cook at the Birsay Bay Tearoom.

### Maintenance

The next item on the list of things to be done will be the replacement of the choir chairs, which are riddled with woodworm, as I mentioned in the Spring issue of *Roond Aboot Birsay*. We will need to do this as soon as possible, before any more damage is done. My old reed organ was so badly affected that it was completely beyond repair. There was no sign of any wormholes on the outside of the organ, so we didn't suspect anything until the workings inside virtually collapsed in a pile of dust.

Fortunately, we have been able to get a replacement for the old electronic organ, which was also beyond repair, this time because the electronics had given up. We acquired the new organ in May, thanks to a perfectly timed visit near the end of April from Malcolm MacSween whose church in Glasgow had an organ surplus to requirements and going free to anyone who could arrange transport. It had only been used three times and is in excellent condition. His father was minister in Sandwick in the 1940s, and it was fortunate for us that Malcolm wasn't free to come to the school reunion last year and came for a few days in April this year instead.

### Visitor from Australia

In August a visitor from Australia, Oliver Jenkins, stayed in the village for a few days. He is the son of Edward Jenkins, who was a missionary in St Magnus Church from 1941 to 1947. He and his wife Rose, an excellent singer and pianist, were very well liked in the community. After they left Birsay, they were in churches in Skye and in North-East Scotland for a few years before emigrating to Australia in 1952. Thanks to Sheila and Ian Campbell, Oliver was able to visit the house in which he had been born in 1945, as had his sister Hazel in 1943. He intended to visit the church, and I'm sure he will have done so, but unfortunately he didn't sign the visitors' book.

## 2.

### Orkney Night

Our *Orkney Night* on the opening evening of the Science Festival this year could almost have been called a *Birsay Night*, because there were so many connections. Robin Nicolson sang three songs by Allie Windwick, who as a youth used to cycle from Kirkwall to Birsay to visit his relatives at the Mill Cottage; the Strathspey and Reel Group played tunes by Gordon Harvey of Raviehall and John Fraser of Feaval; there were humorous poems by Robert Rendall; and the Songshop Singers sang a song written by Jessie Davina Hunter, an aunt by marriage of Annie Irvine and Jean Muir, while she was teaching in Eday in the early 1900s. The singers were led by Sarah Jane Gibbon, whose grandfather was born and brought up in Birsay. There was a big attendance from all over the mainland of Orkney, some coming from as far away as Deerness, but a few more Birsay faces in the audience would have been encouraging.

### Coming Event

Keep your eyes open for details of our annual evening of carol-singing. The programme will include two very fine poems about the shepherds by Robert Rendall, whose recently published poems include many that are at least as good as those he chose for publication.

### Bertie Harvey - Secretary

---

### BIRSAY HERITAGE TRUST

**Wednesday, 20 November 2013, 7:30 PM at the Birsay Community Hall.**

Please put that date on your diary. At that place and time BHT is hosting several talks by well kent speakers. Neil Kermode will present ideas for the centennial of the loss of the *Hampshire* and restoration of the Kitchener memorial; William Shearer will describe the work and discoveries of ARGOS, the aircraft recovery group; and Keith Johnson discusses plans for expanding heritage interests and activities related to Birsay and our relation to Orkney and Britain. Bring your ideas on things or subjects that interest you. We can talk about them over the refreshments afterwards. It is FREE. ALL WELCOME.

The Aerodrome: Last May's '*Roond About Birsay*' reported that committee work had begun a feasibility study concerning the future of the Control Tower and neighbouring Generator House as display areas open to the public. Phase One of the study has been done, and Phase Two is nearly done. Even thus armed, serious time-consuming efforts to raise the funds must begin. The site will be ideal for recording the wartime history of Orkney's air defences and for displaying the many discoveries of the ARGOS. The Twatt aerodrome, formerly the HMS Tern, would be the only WW II Naval Air Station in the UK open to the public. Learn much more at the November meeting.

The Mill and the Bere have had a good year. Visitor numbers topped 3000 again, and bere meal has attracted attention. Rae Phillips has been invited to London as part of Slow Food/Chef Alliance award ceremonies. Also coming in January, Barony Mills will have a display stand at the Scotland's Trade Fair in Glasgow. You may have seen Mr. Stead's video shown at the Science Festival this past September. That was only half; we look forward to the complete video which we will show at a future meeting. All these things should help raise the profile of the Mill and our products.

### 3.

**MEMBERSHIP.** The May issue of 'Roond Aboot Birsay' told the story of BHT being reorganised. We can now accept members. A membership form will be placed on our website, [www.birsay.org.uk](http://www.birsay.org.uk), and copies will be at the Mill (it is winter - the Mill is open at irregular times dictated by the milling work. Phone 721-439). Or contact any committee member (Keith Johnson, Hundaesetter; Johnny Johnston, Springburn, Tommy Matches, Longabar, Rae Phillips, Mill Cottage, Frank Zabriskie, Harpsa, Birsay). The annual membership fee is £10 for single membership, £15 for joint, and £2 for students.

**Frank Zabriskie - Secretary**

---

### **BIRSAY TODDLER GROUP**

Every Tuesday 9.30am - 12 noon

1st Tuesday of each month is lunch day and we stay until 1pm

£2.50 per adult

Take a contribution for snack and a drink for your peedie ones.

We are all enjoying meeting in the new hall, a much warmer, brighter and drier home for us and our toys.

In the last few months we have had the Shapinsay and St Margarets Hope toddlers back for a visit, in return for having entertained us at their halls.

There is going to be a Halloween party on the 29th October at the hall with a mince and clapshot lunch.

In December we will hopefully be welcoming Santa back to our Christmas Party, and he may even have presents for all the good boys and girls.

We will be holding a table top sale of Baby and Kids items in the Birsay Hall on Saturday 16th November from 2-4pm

To book a table contact Dawn Flett 771 796

Also we are planning to hold a craft fair again this year at the beginning of December in the Milestone Church, Dounby, watch for posters for details nearer the time.

**Avril Hay**

---

### **Birsay Harray Sandwick Guild**

At this session's opening meeting Rev Andrea Price launched the new theme "A Fellowship to Build". In October we welcomed members of the local Roman Catholic congregation who gave us an insight into their church activities. Later in October the Orkney Guild Council's annual winter rally takes place in Stromness Church with guest speaker Rev James Wishart.

#### 4.

In November we look forward to hearing about Margaret Ritchie's holiday in New York and at the December meeting the "Orkney Rocks Choir" will provide the entertainment.

In the new year there is to be a talk from Citizens Advice followed in February by some music and memories from Thora Linklater and Ann Tait.

As always we are supporting the national Guild projects and this past year our chosen charity was "Mary's Meals".

This session we are supporting the "Julius Project" which helps homeless people in Scotland. Once again we are participating in the Blytheswood Shoebox Appeal so members and friends are busy covering shoeboxes and filling them with clothes, toiletries and stationery etc ready for distribution in developing countries.

The planned "Songs of Praise" evening which was to have been held last September had to be postponed due to adverse weather conditions. However it eventually went ahead on a fine May evening this year when 40-50 ladies (and 1 gentleman) travelled to Hoy where we enjoyed a great programme of hymn singing, readings etc followed by a lovely supper.

Also in May we held a successful coffee evening in the church and on another evening we enjoyed a meal at the Barony Hotel. We are sorry to be losing one of our members with the departure of Rev. Andrea Price who is moving to London and "new pastures". Hopefully when we get a new minister he or she will be equally supportive of Guild activities.

Meetings are held in the church at 7.30pm on the first Monday of each month from September to April. We will be pleased to welcome new members or visitors (male and female) to share in fellowship and friendship.

#### **Merle Walls - Guild Convener**

---

#### **Dounby Flower Club**

Meetings are held in the Dounby Centre the third Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm  
Do come along, everyone is made very welcome.

**21<sup>st</sup> May** - "In the Bag" and Swap Shop

**16<sup>th</sup> June** - The Club is delighted to host a Workshop from 10am to 4pm taken by National Demonstrator Mr Barry Grey

**18<sup>th</sup> June** - AGM then a workshop "That Vase"

**30<sup>th</sup> June** - 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary "Day Trip to Dunbeath Gardens"

**20<sup>th</sup> August** - Workshop "Down the Garden Path" with Cindy Miller

#### **Sandra Davies - Secretary**

Birsay, Harray and Sandwick ChurchTHANK YOU!

When you read this I will have left Orkney for pastures new: Associate Minister of St Columba's, Pont Street, London - some people are glad to know someone living nearish Harrods! St Columba's is a large international Church of Scotland congregation in a huge city full of contrasts. While the rich step out of their limousines for a bit of shopping in Harrods, not far away the homeless wait for the end of the shopping day to find an entrance to shelter in for the night.

Why am I leaving? It is time. Time for me to have a new challenge. Time to be nearer my family and more available to them. Time also for you to have a change of personnel in the church. For no one person suits everyone. And I feel that being cosy and liking your minister is good and fine, but the minister is there to make you think about life and the hard questions. After 12 years it is time for a new voice to be heard!

For Christianity is not a quaint set of fairy tales, nor a building preservation society. No, Christianity is not even so much about God, as about each other because of God!

So, thank you! Thank you for all the cups of tea over the years and the friendly chats. Thank you for coming to listen to me in your search for ultimate things even occasionally and supporting the Milestone Community Project and the congregation. Thank you for sharing your home Orkney with me and my family. We loved being at home in Orkney and were proud to be so.

And now one last request: if you care for the church even a little and want it to continue, don't stay away but support the Milestone Community Church and those who run it. Everyone counts and church is what you make of it, more so now than ever! CHRCH -what is missing? U!

If you have any questions, concerns or requests please phone the Interim Moderator Rev Bill Whitson, who can at the moment be reached on 874789, or the session clerk Bob Norquay on 721264 or any of the elders you know.

Sunday Worship: 11am in the Milestone Community Church.

And to all of Orkney: THANK YOU!

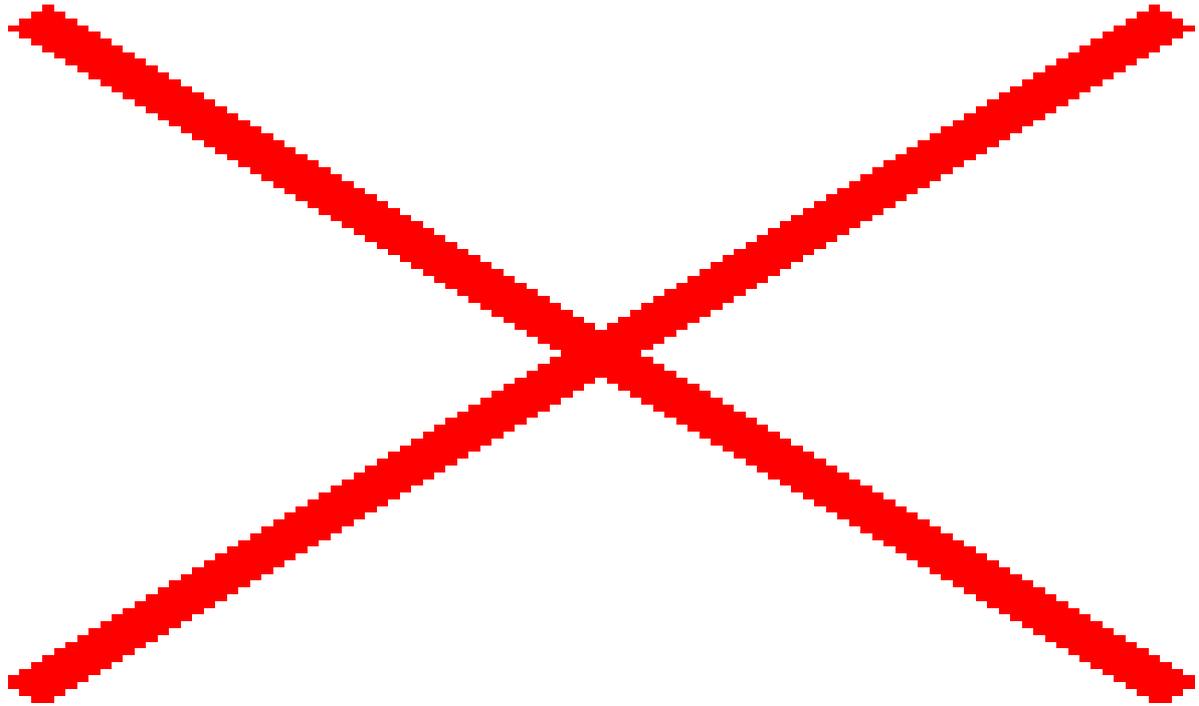
Andrea Price

Editor's Note: I'm sure everyone will join with me in wishing Andrea well in her new project. She has been our Minister now for 12 years and in that time, she has conducted many marriages and funerals, as well as visiting many of us on many occasions, including new births, the loss of our loved ones, illnesses and many other things. I personally always enjoyed singing carols with her at the Annual Tree Lighting ceremony in Dounby every year so I hope the next Minister is a singer as well! Good luck, Andrea. - Johnny.

6.



Did anyone see this? My daughter-in-law, Pamela, took this photo at the Loch of Banks on her way home from Dounby a few weeks ago. I wonder how big the spiders were?



7.

**Dounby Community School - Nursery**

**DOUNBY SCHOOL NURSERY VISIT KIRKWALL POLICE STATION**

At Dounby Nursery the children have been very interested in the Emergency Services. We created a Police Station in our role play area, and the children requested that we made our very own jail and police car. We then went on a visit to the Kirkwall Police Station where we got to see around the station. The Police lady showed us the cells and the CCTV cameras and she also took our finger-prints. We got to go inside a real Police van, and were allowed to press the blue button and horn to get the lights flashing and the siren on.





9.

Dounby Community School

TAG-RUGBY FESTIVAL – PICKY CENTRE



We started off in good spirits... all 55 of us! There were hundreds of pupils from all over Orkney. There were seven teams from Dounby, in groups with a mixture of boys and girls from P5 - P7. It was the first Tag Rugby Festival P5 have been at.

The scores were kept by the pitch managers. After lunch time, the teams were put onto new pitches to play for their ranking on the leader board. We didn't manage to win... but we all did very well in our groups.

Tag Rugby is a non-contact sport which means everyone can join in.. There are lots of skills involved as well as a bit of speed and agility. Everyone put in a lot of effort. Dounby supported each other very nicely even when they faced each other!!! The weather was a bit dull at times but stayed dry for play.

Our pupils were a credit to the school.

## 10.

### An Old Birsay Shipwreck

One of the oldest recorded shipwrecks on the Birsay coast, the Good Intent, master Samuel Swenton, occurred below Banks, Northside, Birsay on the night of 29 August 1807. The vessel was an old wooden craft and started to break up almost immediately on running aground. Of 250 tons burden she was on passage from Archangel to Hull with a crew of eleven, only one of whom survived. Her general cargo consisted of bales of flax and hemp, one thousand barrels of tar, one thousand five hundred and forty two bars of iron, a large quantity of mats and seven casks of pigs bristle.

The only survivor, James Penman, was saved by taking to the ships skiff and it is said in local lore that he was found sitting beside the fire in Nearhouse, Northside in the morning. Nearhouse still exists as a ruin between Hesta and Hawn. He was given lodgings at Boardhouse with Hugh Moar, tacksman, acting on behalf of the Vice Admiral Depute, who saw to the watching and salvaging of the wreckage at which up to eighty men were employed. Salvors were paid two shillings per day, watchers at night two shillings and sixpence, a total cost of twenty one pounds five shillings and nine pence.

The salvage of the iron bars proved difficult as some were lying in water as deep as five fathoms. A small anchor without flukes was used to hook the bars up but this task was recorded as being neither pleasant nor profitable. Many of the bars were bent and were straightened before being stored in the dining room of the Manse at the Palace, Birsay. A quick calculation shows each bar to have weighed about seventy pounds (30kgs). The cargo of iron bars alone would have weighed about fifty tons in total so we would hope they had been properly secured in the hold!

The proceeds of the sale of the cargo amounted to one hundred and thirty five pounds, ten shillings. About one hundred and twenty five iron bars were salvaged with Hugh Moar demanding salvage of three shillings per bar. One hundred and twenty barrels of tar sold for sixteen shillings per barrel. There is no record of how much the pig's bristles or mats realised. The flax and hemp were useless after being in the sea.

Bodies of three of the crew were washed up, one being buried in the kirkyard and the other two where they came ashore.

James Penman was the ships carpenter and stayed on in Birsay for some time afterwards. He was quite adept at fashioning items from wood as a table allegedly made by him with timber from the wreck existed in Birsay until recent times.

Another local story is that the survivor was called Tammy Cowie. He was found washed up on a rock which still bears his name. This rock is not far from the Ship rock on which The Good Intent was lost and would seem to be a more plausible account of what actually happened.

Next time you take a walk to the Whalebone and the tide is out look slightly to the northeast, the furthest out rock is the Ship rock. Ten sailors lost their lives there more than two centuries ago. We can only imagine now what happened that fateful night on the Birsay shore.

### **Tommy Matches**

## **11.**

### **Birsay Community Association**

The association has had a busy summer with wedding receptions and it is lovely that we can now offer local couples a fresh and clean space to celebrate their special day.

We have also had lots of birthday parties and we have purchased a bouncy castle for bairns parties.

The Longship held a fashion show in September with local models and all proceeds from the ticket sales and raffle went to the hall. It was a fantastic evening and very well supported. We were able to try out the new stage extensions, lights and sound system which worked really well.



The Stereo Lobsters in action !!

Caroline Atkinson

