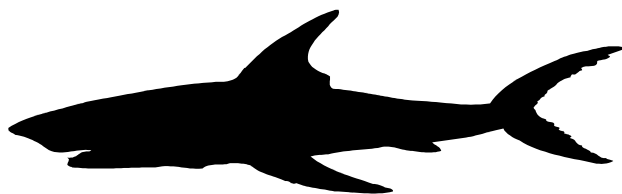


"Roond About Birsay"

News for and by the people of Birsay



Autumn 2012

Issue 41

Editorial

It's time once more to gather together the latest bits of news from around the Parish and to talk about the weather again. It seems that earlier this year it was not quite as bad up here as it was further "sooth" but it has most certainly deteriorated these past few weeks. It must be time for Marty to have his annual interview on Radio Orkney again. Until then, we will just have to hope for an improvement.

Johnny Johnston - Editor.

Birsay Community Council

We are now into a new session of Community Council meetings, with a new Council and a few changes. This time, there were more candidates than were needed to form the Community Council so there was a vote. The successful nominees were chosen and at the first meeting a Chairman and Vice Chairman were elected. The list is as follows:-

Chairman - Johnny Johnston

Vice Chair - David Scarth

Members - Marty Hay, Allan Spence, Kenny Spence, Stevie Spence, Maxwell Tait.

If anyone has anything they would like brought up to a meeting, please get in touch with any of us.

So far, just the usual things have been discussed and dealt with. We did have a Bonfire to celebrate the Queen's Jubilee, along with many more groups in Orkney. Ours was organised in conjunction with the Harray and Sandwick Community Council and was held on the beach at the Point of Buckquoy. It was a most enjoyable evening, with Ruth and Sandy bringing their van out to provide refreshments.

The saga of the proposed car park in the Palace village is still dragging on. Planning permission was refused and our appeal against that decision will be heard in October so we are still waiting to see what happens. I think everyone here who has attended a wedding or a funeral will agree we badly need a bit more parking space.

Don't hesitate to contact any one of us if you have anything to say.

Johnny Johnston - Chairman

THE St Magnus Church Birsay Trust

"Last here in 1942" - This entry, from 21 May, caught my attention when I was looking through the visitors' book. The signature was R A Cooke, and I instantly knew this must be Russell Cooke, who lived with his parents and younger brother from 1940 to 1942 in the house now known as Forst. His father worked for the Air Ministry on the development of the wartime airfields at Twatt and Skea Brae. The school roll showed that they moved to Dounby in 1942, so I thought it was possible that he might have chosen to stay at the Smithfield Hotel. A phonecall confirmed that he and his wife had indeed stayed there. His address in Spalding was "Harvey Cottage" and I wondered if there might be a connection with some of the Dounby Harveys. I wrote to Russell, and I have now had a reply, in which he tells me that they moved back to London in 1944, so there will still be former pupils of Dounby School who remember him. But the "Harvey" in his address isn't connected with Orkney: it's also an old family name in Spalding.

I had asked Russell about his impressions of Orkney after a gap of 70 years. He was surprised at how little it had changed in that time, and both he and his wife were impressed with the tidiness and cleanliness, how good the roads are, the crops and livestock, the courtesy of people everywhere, especially in shops and hotels, and the courtesy shown by motorists towards pedestrians.

Russell and Barbara spent just three days in Orkney, so sight-seeing wouldn't have left time for renewing acquaintances. However, after visiting St Magnus Church they had gone to the Brough, and at the Point of Buckquoy met a retired farmer from Dounby, and they worked out that they must have been at Dounby School at the same time, though not class mates. Their conversation had ended in a bit of a rush, and he didn't know the farmer's name. It's certainly a small world!

Other comments - Most of the comments in the visitors' book are of the kind we have come to expect: "Peaceful"; "Beautifully preserved"; "Lovely - such calm"; "Great to find the door open"; but one or two come from a slightly different angle. A couple from Erskine write: "History should be published more." As appreciative comments are often made about the quality of the information we provide, I take this to mean that St Magnus Kirk should be given a much higher profile in Orkney guide-books, etc. Most of them concentrate on St Magnus Cathedral, which was built in memory of St Magnus, whereas the church in Birsay is associated with his childhood and his original burial, so its historical importance is actually greater than that of the Cathedral.

And a couple from London, visiting during the St Magnus Festival, obviously appreciate this, because their comment is: "Good to be back in the real St Magnus Kirk." It's safe to guess that they are regular Festival visitors who have missed the Festival concerts in St Magnus Kirk since the new Festival Director took over.

Numbers - Visitor numbers are down quite a bit this year, particularly in August. The number of signatures is only a rough guide, but it is just about two-thirds of last year's, and this ties in both with the level of donations and with what we hear from elsewhere.

There have been visitors from 18 different countries apart from the UK, again about two-thirds of the usual number, with most coming, unsurprisingly, from the USA and Canada, and with Germany and Norway also well represented. A German family writes: "Back again. We love the Orkneys."

Archive photographs - We have added to the archive photographs which we had on display last year, and there are now over 320. Roger Davies has again done all the work of typing the identification, as well as taking the photos to, and collecting the enhanced copies from, the Photographic Archive, a time-consuming job for which he deserves not just our thanks, but yours too, because the photos are a record of many aspects of a vanishing, or vanished, way of life. In quite a number of cases we have been able to add more information to what we gave last year.

The photos were put on display in the gallery in the church at the beginning of September.

A comment by visitors from Powys in Wales was: "Wonderful archive - what an achievement!"

We are still interested in old Birsay photos, so if you have any you could lend us for copying, please look them out.

Of particular interest would be:

Spreading/raising peats.

Using a scythe/"opening roads"

A blacksmith at work.

Cuithes drying

Photos of former ministers.

Orkney Night - Our Orkney Night on 6 September was, in the opinion of many, our best concert yet - I take that to include all our Science Festival events. There was a large attendance, but we would have liked to see a few more Birsay faces. The Strathspey and Reel Society were in lively form, Robin Nicolson sang George Corrigan songs, recalling the old ways of farming, and the Songshop Choir sang old Orcadian songs as well as folk songs from other countries. But the revelation of the evening was the re-discovery of humorous poems by Robert Rendall. They were actually adverts for George Rendall's shop, based on well-known poems and songs such as *Scots wha hae*, and brilliantly done. This year we had several readers, since each poem is written in a different style, all from Birsay except for Cameron Stout who we "imported" to be a reporter on *The Orcadian in 1933*, reading a spoof report of a visit from the Loch Ness Monster, which struck terror into Kirkwallians.

Bertie Harvey, Secretary

RSPB

A corncrake - a bird once found across the UK but now much rarer and only found in the Western Isles and Orkney in this country - was heard near Boardhouse Loch on 9 June and continued calling in the evening for the next few weeks. Farmer Derry Sinclair agreed to mow the fields surrounding the bird in a 'corncrake friendly' pattern - mowing from the inside of the field outwards, allowing the birds more of a chance to escape. Unfortunately, the corncrake was not heard at this location after the mowing but another male was heard near Swannay farm on 6 July, so it might have moved.

If you hear a corncrake calling next year please report it to the RSPB.

Amy Liptrot - Project Officer - Corncrake Initiative
Orkney Office
RSPB Scotland

"Summertime and the living is easy...."

So goes a wonderful sultry song from America. We had all hoped for a hot summer. Instead we got a lot of rain and cool weather, though it seems that we had the best weather in the UK.

However coming to church is a positive pleasure now, whatever the weather. In the new building it is warm, comfortable and light.. People who came in for weddings, funerals , baptisms, ordinary services and coffee evenings have all commented on what an airy, uplifting space it is. You will enjoy your new hall so much when it is done and all the effort will be worthwhile judging by our experience!

Some people say there is a cross missing outside to indicate that it is a church. But the cross is only part of our faith story, even if a very important part. And next time you come into the Milestone Community Church I challenge you to spot the two crosses incorporated into the building, one small yellow sandstone cross and one part of the architecture.

On 6 October 2012 we will have a Sale of Work in the Milestone Community Church and any funds raised will go towards ordinary church expenses for our congregation. And nearer Christmas join us for any of the Christmas services on offer. Posters will let you know the details or you could look up our Facebook page: Birsay, Harray and Sandwich Church. You will be made most welcome.

Best wishes

Andrea Price, minister for Birsay, Harray and Sandwich
Church of Scotland

Tel: 771803

Birsay Harray & Sandwick Guild

We are now delighted to be able to meet in the warm and comfortable surroundings of the Milestone Community Church.

To open the new session we held a successful coffee evening at the end of August.

Then on 3rd September we had a very interesting and amusing illustrated talk from Rev. James Wishart and his wife, Helen, who reminisced on their journey from farm work in South Ronaldsay to ministry in Aberdeenshire and now retirement back in Orkney. This fitted in well with the theme for 2012/2013 "A Faith to Proclaim"

We now look forward to welcoming John Muir to the October meeting to tell the story of The Churchill Barriers and The Italian Chapel.

Later, in October, the Orkney Guild Council is holding the annual Winter Rally in St. Magnus Centre when the speaker will be Rev Alison Burnside.

In November Tom Muir is to relate some old Orkney customs and at December's meeting entertainment will be provided by The Salvation Army.

Members are busy knitting teddies for children in 3rd World countries and we are also participating in the annual Blytheswood Shoebox Appeal with our contributions of clothing, toiletries, stationery etc.

As always we will be supporting one of the six projects suggested by Guild Office but have not yet decided which charity to chose.

This year Church of Scotland Guild celebrates its 125th anniversary and, to mark the occasion, the Orkney Guilds are to get together in Hoy Church on Friday 14th September for a "Songs of Praise" evening.

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

Merle Walls, Convener.

Birsay, Harray and Sandwick Guild.

Dounby Flower Club

1st August Dounby Flower Club were honoured to host a Flower Demonstration by National Demonstrator Barry Grey. Around 140 people gathered in the Dounby Centre for what was a spectacular display of flowers entitled "A Jewel Set in Nature's Crown" This was a very memorable evening for the club.

Our meetings are held in the Dounby Centre the third Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm.

Do come along, everyone is made very welcome.

18th September - Workshop "Triangular by Design" with Bertha Mainland

16th October - Workshop "Seedheads" with Sandra Davies

20th November - Open Night, demonstration by Grace Currie. If you are not sure about coming to a meeting why not try the Open Night! We have a Sales Table, a Demonstration, Supper and a friendly chat!

2013

15th January - "Burn's Supper" with a Peedie Table Arrangement

19th February - Workshop "Bunch of Carnations" with Alison Grieve

19th March - Workshop "Fascinating Rhythm" with Pat Kirkpatrick

16th April - Workshop "History in the Making" with Karen Johnston & Debra Kirkness

21st May - "In the Bag" and Swap Shop

18th June - "That Vase" and AGM

29th June - Club Outing

20th August - Workshop "Down the Garden Path" with Cindy Miller

Sandra Davies

Secretary

Milestone Community Church Sunday Club

The Sunday Club started their new session on Sunday 1st September with a fantastic turnout of 16 children - thank goodness for the help of Lisa Alexander! We have 8 adult helpers at the moment but would welcome additional volunteers. The adults work in pairs usually for 3/4 weeks at a time.

The Sunday Club meet together before the service and then join the congregation for the first two hymns followed by a short talk, given by Andrea, introducing the focus for that morning.

We then move through to the room behind the main worship area. The focus is further developed through storytelling, games and craft. Children enjoy sharing their experiences with each other and when possible with the congregation.

What do they think of the new church?



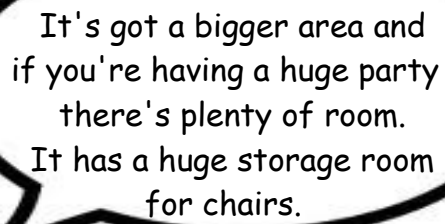
It's a lot bigger
Sunday Club Room and we
have our own Forum Room.

Iesha

I

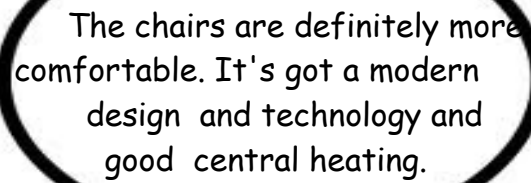
It's quite good - the fact
that it's big and new.

Christopher




It's got a bigger area and
if you're having a huge party
there's plenty of room.
It has a huge storage room
for chairs.

Joseph




The chairs are definitely more
comfortable. It's got a modern
design and technology and
good central heating.

Hamish



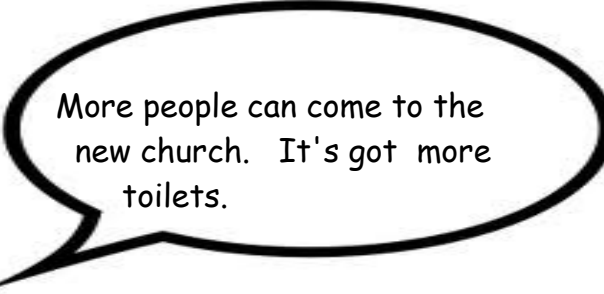
It's got a bigger room
to play in.

Erin



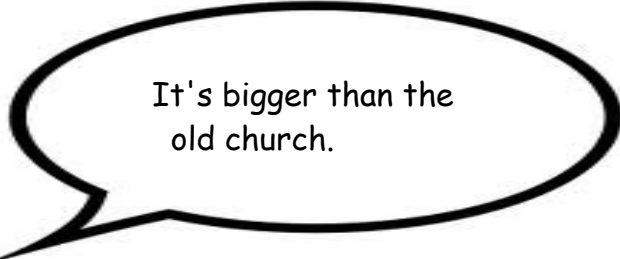
I like the worship space
better than the old church.

Jenna



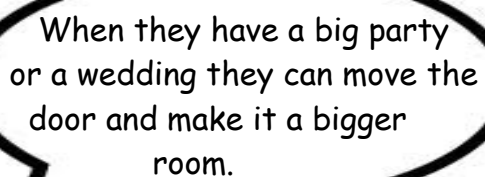
More people can come to the
new church. It's got more
toilets.

Emily



It's bigger than the
old church.

Emma



When they have a big party
or a wedding they can move the
door and make it a bigger
room.

Loraina

Dounby Community School



As part of a 'Plants & Growing' project before the summer break, Primary 5/6 established a vegetable patch in the school grounds. The pay-off from all this hard work is now being appreciated, as the class are able to enjoy picking (and eating) a healthy crop of vegetables with Miss Flett. These include historic varieties of potato, a bumper crop of peas, lettuce, beetroot and turnips. This project is part of an on-going initiative to improve and make better use of the school grounds at Dounby Community School.

Reading Week at Dounby School.

Encouraging the enjoyment of reading is a continuing priority at Dounby Community School. Recently, a week of exciting reading events were organised across the stages. These included: shared reading activities for pupils, parents & carers at an open evening; a reading workshop for Primary 1 parents; creating 'big books' in classes; a bookswap for used books; a storyteller visit for Nursery-Primary 3 and even a day of dressing up as your favourite book character!

The aim of these activities was to further inspire positive attitudes towards books and reading, and it was well received across the school.



Murray Gallacher
Class Teacher

Hundasaeter Weather Station Jan - Jun 2012

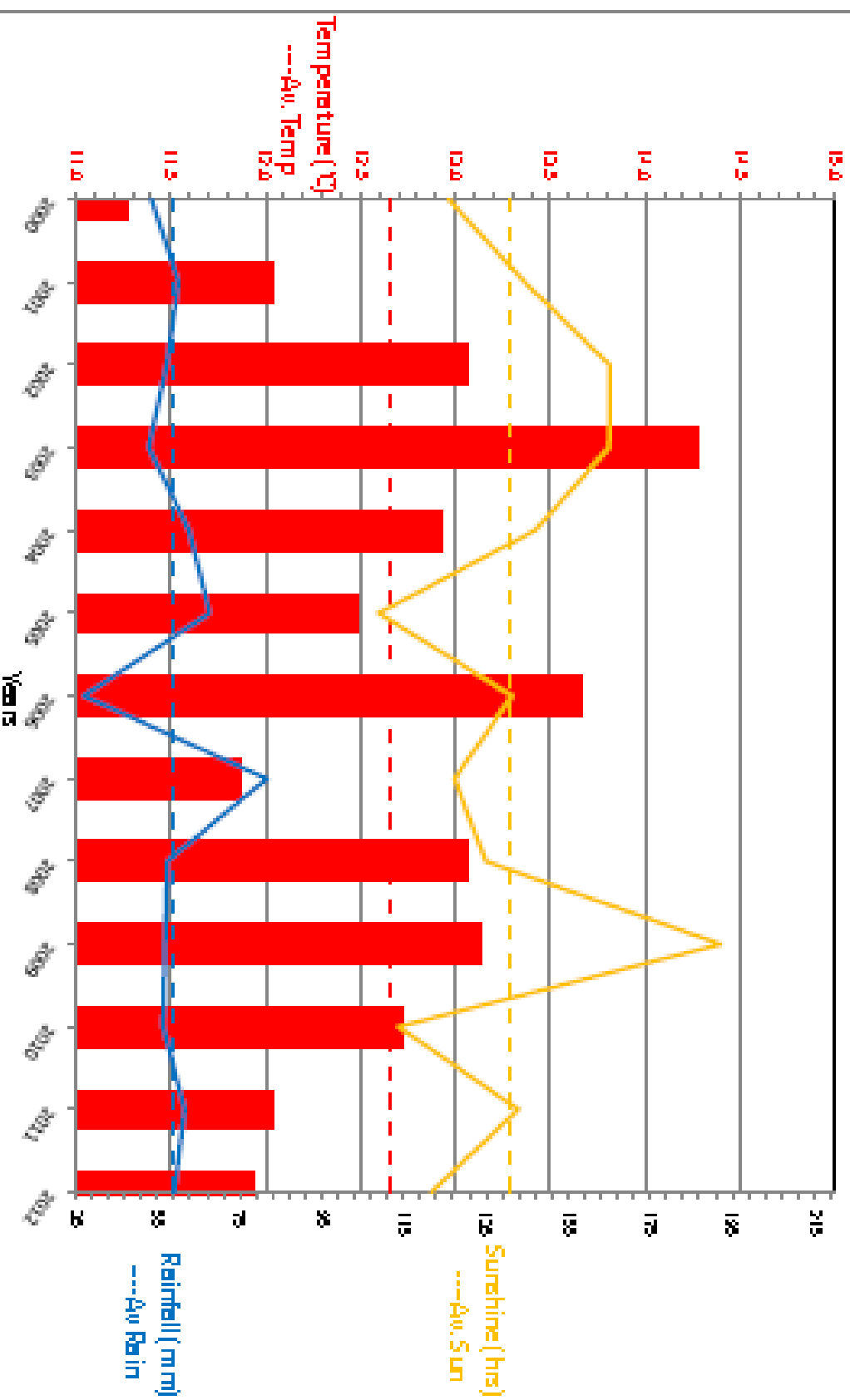
Month	Max Temp	Min Temp	Rain - mm	Sun - hrs	Knots	
					Max Wind	Avg Wind
January	10.4	-3.2	149.2	33.7	54.8	16.0
February	11.8	-2.5	87.2	42.7	49.6	15.9
March	19.4	0.0	45.0	97.5	46.1	14.5
April	12.2	-2.0	87.0	133.2	39.1	12.0
May	24.2	-2.5	64.3	253.9	49.7	11.4
June	18.5	-0.1	53.0	156.0	33.9	11.5

The first 6 months of 2012 has a number of extremes in temperature. There was little hard frost; March was the warmest March since records began in 1827; the March high temp was the highest since 1857; by contrast April was a cool month. May was the sixth sunniest month since 1881 with a high temperature of 24.2°C being the highest since 1857. Rainfall was 50mm more than the 50 year Grimsetter average.

Loch of Hundland Climate Station

AKJ

Birsay Sun, Rain, Temperature June, July, August 2000-2012



The above represents the average temperature, the average hours of sunshine and the average rainfall in Birsay. It is observed that 2000 was the warmest year in the period covered by 2000. The average rain does not vary a great deal except for 2006 is dry summer and 2007 is the wettest. This year rainfall was average 115mm for all the other years of UK in July. The average of sunshine over the months was a great deal more than was with 2000 being the sunniest summer by a long way.

The Rubonia

A few months ago, as Bertie Harvey was sorting through some photographs to add to the St Magnus Church Birsay Trust archive, he found a photo in his late Aunt Bella's collection. This depicted a sailor with the following handwritten note along the bottom. "Rubonia." Sunk by a German submarine, June 22nd 1915. Landed at Birsay June 24th 1915. On the reverse an address was written, Mr John Kanston, Windan, Russia. Whether or not this was the sailor's name is lost in time.

Not having heard of this happening before and curious to find out more I visited the Archives and along with a trawl of the internet managed to find the following information. As this occurred during WW1 the newspaper reports were subject to censorship.

The Russian steamer, Rubonia, on passage from Cardiff to Russia with a cargo of coal, was sunk by the crew of a German submarine placing explosives on board. The crew of the Rubonia had completed what they thought was the most dangerous part of their journey and were north of Orkney. This was on the morning of Thursday 22nd June 1915. The Captain became aware of a surfaced submarine travelling at speed and about a mile and a half distant. The submarine fired two shots, the second coming close to the ship. A third shot was then fired going over the bridge and as the Rubonia's best speed laden was only around eight knots the Captain decided to heave to.

The submarine came alongside demanding the ships papers but as the skipper was not minded to leave the ship he sent the mate over instead. This was unacceptable to the submarine commander and he ordered the Captain to come himself. Meanwhile the commander sent some of his men, including an engineer, on to the Rubonia with several bombs. The Germans helped themselves to champagne, brandy, bread, ham and other foodstuffs and questioned the Captain closely about his flags, especially the American colours. Explaining that the flag was old and almost useless he would not admit that he had been in the habit of using it. As this explanation was surely not acceptable to the submarine commander he decided to sink the ship.

The German engineer made ready the explosives and, opening the sea cocks, allowed the Russian crew to escape in two of the ship's boats, the submarine circling the ship until she sank.

The weather was calm and clear, allowing the boats containing the thirty crew to stay together. As darkness approached on the first night a ship was sighted but they received no response on firing off distress signals. Land was sighted on the second evening, the crew electing to wait until morning before approaching the coast which was Birsay, Orkney. There is no record of where in Birsay they landed. They were transported to Kirkwall on Saturday evening of the 24th June. The Orcadian notes that the men were ill prepared for a sojourn in small boats, having left the steamer in the clothes they stood in.

The submarine which sank the ship was U36 commanded by Ernst Graeff. She was built at the Germaniawerft, Kiel and launched on 6th July 1914 being commissioned 14th November 1914. Her career was short, completing only two patrols and meeting her fate off the Hebrides two days after sinking the Rubonia. She was sunk by gunfire from the Q-ship Prince Charles. A Q-ship was a heavily armed merchant ship in disguise specially designed to lure submarines into making surface attacks.

The Rubonia was a 3644 tons, coal cargo ship, built in 1896 by Palmer and Co., Newcastle upon Tyne, powered by a triple expansion steam engine giving a top speed of 10 knots. Measuring 350ft x 45ft x 25ft she had sailed under several names, first as the "British Trader" then the "Sotrudnik" and finally "Rubonia" owned by the Russian East Asiatic Steam Ship Co.

In the unlikely event of any "Roond Aboot Birsay" reader having further information on the Rubonia, I would be pleased to record it.

T I Matches

September 2012

Birsay Community Association

New Hall

The steering committee had a tour of the new hall on Friday 27th Sept and were pleased with the progress inside the hall. Things were further along than they had anticipated. The schedule of works has a completion date of 31 January 2013. The committee are to carry out the landscaping around the hall as part of our 'work in kind' for our grant funding. We will also be carrying out the tree planting and hope to organise a weekend to involve the whole community to plant the trees in the spring. In the meantime we would be very grateful if anyone has tree or shrub cuttings that they could bring on for planting in the spring.

Old Hall

Time to say goodbye.....

We would like to organise events to celebrate the old hall before we move into the new hall. We would be interested to hear from anyone who maybe has photos of functions on in the old hall throughout the years that we could display over a weekend. We have booked 'Shogun' to play at a Final Fling dance on Sat 29th December 2012. This will be a ticket dance and for over 18's. Tickets will go on sale in November (date and time to be confirmed). If you would like to contact the committee about final functions or have any memorabilia that we could use please contact:

Caroline on 721452 or ceamatkinson@btinternet.com or Ann on 721301

The Good old days?

BIRTHDAYS IN THE OLD DAYS



BIRTHDAYS NOWADAYS



BEFORE

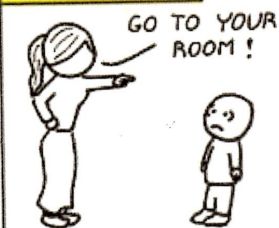


NOW



	IN THE OLD DAYS	NOW
LISTENING TO MUSIC		
WATCHING FILMS		
CHATTING WITH FRIENDS		
READING THE NEWS		
PLAYING MUSIC		

when I was a kid



kids today

