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# "Roond About Birsay"

*News for and by the people in Birsay*

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**February 2004**



**Issue 24**

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## **Editorial**

Hello there, and welcome to the first edition of "Roond About Birsay" for 2004. We won't say 'Happy New Year' since it is a while since then, but we will say we wish you all the best for 2004. All the usual rules apply to this newsletter - we hope you find something you like, and if you don't, put an article in from yourself for next time. We seem to have quite a good selection this issue, so we hope you enjoy it!

Johnny Johnston

- Co- Editors -

Morag Spence

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## **BIRSAY COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

This is a reasonably quiet time for us, since we don't normally have meetings over the Christmas and New Year period. However, some things have still been going on.

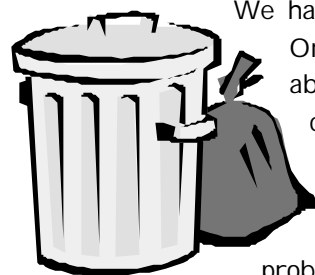
We have now acquired a plaque to put on the well at Mans Well. This was done by Scott Graphics from Rousay. I expect many of you will have admired Sheila Scott's work in the new Terminal building at Kirkwall Airport. We hope to get the plaque erected by St Magnus Day in April. We have also been thinking about getting the pump at the well restored.

We have recently been trying to find storage for our various pieces of equipment - lawnmowers etc., as well as the two bench seats we have at the Whalebone and at Skipi Geo. We had been thinking about the old Smithy in Dounby but it would be too expensive to get it in decent condition so we have now got Alan Norquoy to make a wooden shed for us and we hope to have it erected in the kirkyard soon.

We are also hoping to get some kerbing along the edge of the grass at St Magnus Church where it is a bit of a mess at the moment. Hopefully that will tidy up that area.

Speaking of tidying up, we are still hopeful of funding for an Amenity Site for the West

Mainland to solve the constant problem of refuse disposal. As I reported in our last issue, "fly tipping" has been taking place in the Birsay peat banks. We have so far been unable to identify the culprits but we will be watching. It is a disgraceful practice and we hope that anyone who knows who is responsible will contact one of our Community Councillors and let us know.



We have also approached the Orkney Islands Council about garden refuse collections in the West Mainland and an Amenity Site would also solve that problem.

We have always maintained a close contact with the Police and they regularly attend our meetings. Normally it has been Sergeant Davie Matheson who came and he attended our last meeting to say his goodbyes to us. He has now retired after a long service in Orkney and we all wish him a long and happy retirement.

That's about all for this issue except to remind you all to get in touch with any of us if you have something to say.

Johnny Johnston - Chairman



### ***It's Freezing***

*The ice trickles as the branches come to life*

*Trees whistle and sway from side to side*

*Birds huddle together to make a chirpy song*

*People make snowmen and shivers as he grows*

*Whilst the snow is falling faster people fade away*

*Creating a white blanket of snow*

By  
Briony Marcus



### **The Cold Day**

The ice shines like a piece of glass

Trees are like still monsters

Birds fly south for warmer climes

People dressed in woolly scarves, hats and gloves

Whilst children slide on frozen puddles, breaking the ice as they go.

✓ Super Tami  
7/20/22

### ***Cold Day***

Colds and coughs are spreading around  
Old people sitting by their warm fires  
Long icicles hanging from the rooftops  
Doors shut when people go to play in the snow

Day has now become night  
And the stars are shining bright  
Yeah shout the parent when the COLD DAYS have gone

Sarah

### **Winter Nights**

Winter night are sharp and cold

In the daytime people have fun  
Nights are dark with shining stars

Towards the end of the day  
streets start to empty  
Evening time the snow storms arrive

Round the fire we drink our cocoa

Inside its nice and warm  
Grabbing the daytime light  
Hands let out the darkness  
The days finished now  
Sometimes I wonder where the time goes

Rosanna

## Birsay, Harray & Sandwick Churches

Here is a letter to all of us from .... Well, read for yourself...



" s you got up this morning, I watched you and I hoped you would talk to me, even if it

was just a few words, asking my opinion or thanking me for something good that happened in your life yesterday - but I noticed you were too busy trying to find the right outfit to put on and wear to work. I waited again. When you ran around the house getting ready I knew there would be a few minutes for you to stop and say hello, but you were too busy. At one point you had to wait fifteen minutes with nothing to do except sit in a chair. Then I saw you spring to your feet. I thought you wanted to talk to me but you ran to the phone and called a friend to get the latest gossip. I watched as you went to work and I waited patiently all day long. With all your activities guess you were too busy to say anything to me.

I noticed that before lunch you looked around, maybe you felt embarrassed to talk to me, that is why you didn't bow your head. You glanced three or four tables over and you noticed some of your friends talking to me briefly before they ate, but you didn't. That's OK. There is still more time left, and I have hope that you will talk to me and yet you went home and it seems as if you had lots of things to do.

After a few of them were done you turned on the TV. I don't know if you like TV or not, just about anything goes there and you spend a lot of time each day in front of it, not thinking about anything - just enjoying

the programme. I waited patiently again as you watched the TV and ate your meal but again you didn't talk to me. Bedtime I guess you felt too tired. After you said goodnight to your family you flopped into bed and fell asleep in no time. That's OK because you may not realise that I am always there for you. I've got patience more than you will ever know. I even want to teach you how to be patient with others as well. I love you so much that I will wait every day for a nod, prayer or thought or a thankful part of your heart.

It is hard to have a one-sided conversation. Well, you are getting up again and once again I will wait with nothing but love for you hoping that today you will give me some time. Have a nice day!



Your friend,

**OD"**

The congregation of Birsay, Harray and Sandwick (Church of Scotland) is looking for new members. If you want to come on a journey of exploration come to Twatt Church on Tuesday 24 February at 7.30pm. This will be the first of three meetings giving a chance to quiz the minister and give God some time. Of course you could just come to Church, speak to me or one of the other church folk.

My telephone number is 771803.

And a happy year 2004 to all of you!

Rev Andrea Price

## Councillor Chat

We are now well into the first year of this new Council and still we see no resolution to the underfunding of Orkney Islands Council by the Scottish Executive. We make our case as often as possible without becoming irritating but, although we get sympathetic murmurings, we get no resolution. We had hoped that having our MSP as Deputy First Minister of the Scottish Executive we would have a strong and influential voice within the Executive to have some action on the issue but as yet this is not the case. When I first joined the Council and government was in Westminster we never seemed to have the same problems with finance as we do now that we are funded by the Scottish Executive in Edinburgh. I wonder where all the money goes apart from the new Parliament building. If I was a cynic I would say that all the labour councils in the central belt benefit most as that is where all the labour votes are.

Looking to the future there are one or two major issues coming to the fore. The huge upsurge in demand for housing in Orkney has seen the supply of available houses decreasing significantly and more worrying the price of houses appears to have increased about 50% in the past year. We suffer from a lack in all types of houses from private housing to social rented housing. The council has provided some serviced sites in Kirkwall and Stromness and these have been taken up very quickly. We are still hoping to provide serviced sites in Dounby and Burray in the near future. A major effect of the scarcity of housing is how do young people get a foot on the housing ladder – availability of housing at prices people can afford. You may recall that one of my arguments against the planning policy for houses in Birsay was the fact that it did not encourage or allow young people to obtain land to build houses. If we do not retain young people in our communities then our community will wither and not prosper. I believe that the Council is at last waking up to the fact that the local plan housing location policy is too restrictive and will need to be modified. Needless to say I will be trying to make the case for Birsay having a more sensible approach to

housing sites. I know of at least five young people who have expressed a desire to build in Birsay but they are unable to obtain sites in their preferred locations under the planning guidelines.

The housing situation is closely linked to what is projected to happen to the Orkney population in the next 10 to 20 years. With a reduction in population will come a change in the demography of the Orkney population. More and more elderly people and fewer young people. The challenge is to keep and increase our young population with good jobs, a good quality of life, a safe community and a clean, balanced environment. No-one knows the effect the CAP reforms will have on

Birsay or Orkney but I suspect that things will change and our communities will change. These are major challenges for the Council and the people of Orkney. The Council is only the mechanism by which the people can look after their community. If the Council is not doing enough in the areas that really matter to you or going in the wrong direction then you need to tell us.

It is good to see the care home in Dounby progressing. I suspect completion will be early in 2005.

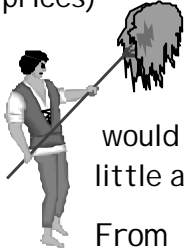
You may remember we were being encouraged to sign up to a Highlands and Islands Enterprise initiative for the provision of Broadband connections. This initiative has been partially overtaken by an announcement that BT have designated the Harray exchange as one which will be upgraded for Broadband communications if there are enough expressions of interest. This means that if 100 users express an interest then BT will upgrade the exchange. I urge all those on the Harray exchange who thinks they might want Broadband to send their names to BT. This can be done on the BT web site [www.bt.com/broadband](http://www.bt.com/broadband). I would hope that the Birsay exchange will then follow either through BT or the HIE initiative. Anyone can contact me at Hundasaeter or by phone on 771328 or by e-mail on [ak.johnson@btopenworld.com](mailto:ak.johnson@btopenworld.com).



## FARMING A HUNDRED YEARS AGO

(from the diary of John Johnston, Houseby, Beaquoydside)

The weather in the first half of September 1903 was poor, with several days of heavy rain. It finally changed on the 14th, and there wasn't any rain until the last two days of the month. On the 8<sup>th</sup>, my grandfather 'Sold ram to Geo. Garson, 26/-', and at the Dounby Market the following Thursday, he 'Bought ram lamb from Wm. Adamson for 26/-' (£80.26 at today's prices)



Harvest was being thought about, as he was at the Smithy of Bea with parts of the reaper. On 21st, he was 'At Vinbrake for new cart, Paid £6-15/-'. The cart would now cost £416.75, although I can't imagine that anyone could make a cart for as little as that at the present time.

From my own memories of farming almost fifty years ago, the midden was emptied each spring. In 1903, this surely wasn't the case, as 54 loads of dung were carted to the land of Midhouse at the end of September and beginning of October.

The harvest was very late and finally started on 15th October, when he wrote 'Commenced to cut oats at Midhouse. Harvest hands came home.' The cutting continued as the weather allowed, and was finally completed on 4th November. Cold, dry weather allowed stack-building to go ahead from 5th to 11th November, and there were 20 stacks in total. The thatching of the stacks was done over a three-day period, about a week later.

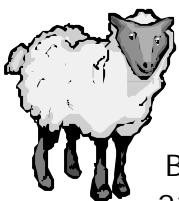
Immediately the harvest was over, ploughing commenced, although it was interrupted by the taking up of potatoes - a total of 7 loads. Turnips and crop were also being carted in to feed the stock, although there is never any mention of when the cattle went out in the spring or were taken in again at the back end.

An important part of each farm's food chain is mentioned on 17th November - 'Helping Cloke to kill pig.' This must have been the time of year for this task as Houseby's pig was killed on the 26th.



There were some 'Very Stormy' days in the second half of November, with the first snow arriving on the 25th. After a one-day thaw, the snow returned and lasted until 7th December. The main task recorded during the winter months is the same as today's farm - the feeding of the animals. Where it differed from today was that the oats and bere were milled to provide an important part of the human diet.

During December and January 1904, 23 days were spent ploughing stubble and ley, although this would only have been part of each day as other tasks are also recorded. The Doctor's Subscription was paid on 3d December and was 4/- (£12.35). It was Dr Suttie who was in Dounby at that time. You paid an annual subscription, and then paid for any medicine or treatment as required.



At the Dounby Market on 10th December, a ram was sold to James Kirkness for 29/- (£89.52). The stipend was also paid and was £2-6/3½ (£142.62).

Back in November it was recorded that he had been 'At Jolly's van for flour.' On 23rd December, 'At W. B. Firth's van' is written, and the following week, he

*'Bought ½ cwt linseed, paid 7/6d' (£23.15).*

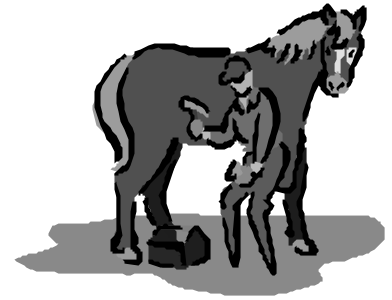
Sunday was a sacred day and was always written as '*Sabb.* ' '*At Church*' is all that is ever recorded.

December ended with over a week of frosty weather but it began to thaw on Hogmanay. New Year's Day was a Friday and all that is written is '*Holding New Year's Day.*'

The weather in January was fairly mixed, not dissimilar to what you might expect today. Snow showers fell on the 16th but did not lie.

On 8th January, a calf was bought from Wm. Adamson for 37/6d (£1 15.76).

At that time, any repairs needed to implements and machinery were done at the Smithy of Bea, whereas the horses were always shod at the Dounby Smithy. One of the mares, Fanney, seemed to suffer from lameness at times. There were no official vets, but James Kirkness from Moan in Harray was a veterinarian of some sort and was frequently called on.



Moving on to February, there were several days of snow showers from the north-east around the middle of the month but, otherwise, the weather was fairly mixed.

At that time, Road Money was paid each February, but no amount is recorded.

I'll take it up from there in the next newsletter if readers think this is of any interest.

Submitted by Harold Esson



### The Birsay Bairns

Although more than halved in number from a few years ago, the 'Birsay Bairns' and their well-travelled and dedicated tutor, Jean Leonard, continue to meet at the Twatt Kirk on a Wednesday night. She has taught, encouraged and, shall we say, audibly cajoled her less attentive pupils - aye, you ex-Academy pupils will remember it well!

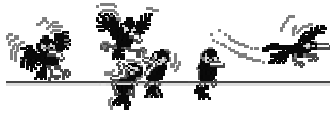
'The Bairns' have performed at several venues over the past year. The first event was a fund-raising stint at the Palace on a lovely Sunday afternoon during June. Pity we clashed with other events, as not many people turned out to support the group but, for those who did, it was a very pleasant afternoon. They also performed at a car boot sale in the Birsay Hall last autumn

where we also managed a bit of fund-raising. September saw a few of the older members play at Kylie Tullock's wedding in the St Magnus Kirk followed by a big group playing to the wedding party at the Stromness Academy. Finally, Jean pulled together a group to play at the Burn's Supper in the Birsay Hall last Saturday night.

If you have heard 'the Bairns' performing or are a grateful parent, I hope you will agree that we owe Jean a huge debt of gratitude for her dedicated tuition over the years. We are lucky to have her teaching our children and the results will hopefully be heard for years to come, as they continue their fiddle and accordion playing.

CGH





This is the first RSPB contribution to the newsletter but hopefully, from now on, there will be a reserves update in every edition.

As I'm sure most of you will know, three of the thirteen RSPB reserves in Orkney are situated wholly or partly in the parish of Birsay. They are The Loons and Loch of Banks, Marwick Head, and Birsay Moors Reserves.

On the **Birsay Moors** reserve, work continued with alternative methods of moorland management. Three plots totalling 120 ha were lightly grazed by cattle. We are already seeing positive changes in the vegetation structure, which should increase the numbers of voles and small birds and ultimately therefore, birds like the Hen Harrier. The Muirburn Project, which began two winters ago, has three 30 ha 'burn plots'. 31 small patches totalling 10 ha were burned by the Orkney Business Ring who were contracted to carry out the work. We hope to burn a quarter of each plot over the next 5 years.



The penultimate phase of the Evie fence was completed, allowing full control over our largest grazing compartment: 449 ha of heather moorland, to benefit breeding Hen Harriers and other key moorland species.

On the Durkadale section of the reserve, management to benefit farmland birds, including Twite, Reed Bunting and Corncrake, continued. As well as one hectare of barley, there was a hectare of Winter Farmland Bird crop and a patch of kale, which were left unharvested over winter to provide a valuable food source for seed-eating birds. There were peak counts of 100 Reed Buntings, 30 Skylarks, 320 Linnets, 200 Twite and 165 Redwings. The crop contained the conspicuous blue flower, *Phacelia* which provided a great source of nectar and pollen for bumblebees. As a result the scarce Great Yellow Bumblebee was just one of several types of bee which were attracted to the crop.



We continue to be closely involved in the monitoring of the breeding success of birds of prey, especially Hen Harriers. Detailed observations showed clearly that 2003 was another good season for our harriers, the third in a row, almost certainly the result of the superb summer weather. Of the 51 occupied breeding sites in Orkney, fourteen were on the Birsay Moors reserve. In all, 56 young were raised in the county. It remains to be seen what will happen when we get our next wet summer but meantime, SNH are forging ahead with their scheme to encourage farmers to create better feeding habitat for harriers on the moorland flange.

Progress was made on our proposed wetland management plan for **The Loons and Loch of Banks** involving close liaison with SNH. We should soon be able to start work at The Loons allowing greater water control with, consequently, better control of grazing management. For the second year running, an extra 4.5 ha of marsh at the Loch of Banks was temporarily fenced and grazed. The fence was removed after the grazing period and will



be re-established for grazing as and when required. This grazing management greatly benefits the breeding populations of waders and wildfowl. Even without all of this management in place, it was a good year for breeding birds with above average numbers of wader chicks being raised and 5-7 pairs of the rare Pintail. This is nearly 15% of the UK breeding population.

We hope soon to receive planning permission for the replacement of the small, old and now decrepit hide with a larger version, equipped with a ramp for wheelchair access. This should be in place for the start of the 2004 visitor season.

(There will be a full article featuring The Loons and Loch of Banks Reserve appearing soon in 'The Orcadian'.)

Seabirds generally had a poor season in 2003, although nowhere near as bad as in Shetland where breeding failure amongst a number of species was almost total. **Marwick Head** is one of three sites in the West Mainland where Kittiwake and Guillemot colonies are monitored. The former are splash-divers whilst the latter are deeper diving species. In both cases, they had their poorest season since monitoring began in 1986. All the evidence points towards this summer being one of low sandeel availability, food supply being the major controlling factor of seabird breeding success.



On a more positive note, the levels of oiling of Orkney's seabirds were the lowest on record since the Orkney Beached Bird Survey began in 1976, Mar Wick being one of the beaches monitored. However, the survey did produce more evidence of food supply problems, as large numbers of dead and dying Guillemots came ashore in the early autumn. We also continue to be involved in monitoring plastic pollution by means of collecting Fulmar corpses and investigating their stomach contents as part of the wider 'Save the North Sea' project. We still urgently need any whole Fulmars that you find dead. So please contact the office if you come across any with their stomachs intact!

A few other snippets of information:-

Our part-time Field Teacher, Louise Scott, had involvement with nine different schools during the year, often using the Birsay Outdoor Centre as a base from which to work. In addition, she had a large input into the Orkney Schools 'Environment Week' held in early June. Some of you may have noticed that all three of the reserves now have new information boards mounted on natural stone plinths. These replace the old boards, which contained some out-of-date information.

If anyone has any questions relating to any of the Birsay reserves or if you have any interesting records of birds or other wildlife, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us at the Stromness Office on 850176.

Keith Fairclough

Senior Site Manager, Orkney Reserves.





## The St Magnus Church Birsay Trust



### **The Building**

You will have noticed that we had the windows and door of the church painted in summer, but you may not know that we took the opportunity to have

the vestry painted at the same time, and we plan to use it as a small gallery. At the moment we have half a dozen pictures, and we hope to add to these as time goes on. Later this year we plan to have prints made of four paintings by Mrs Macpherson, who designed the stained glass window, and we will have these framed and hung in the gallery. We have already had comments from visitors, saying that they like what we are doing with the gallery. And visitors continue to comment on the beautiful wall-hanging made by Dounby School pupils.

### **Visitors**

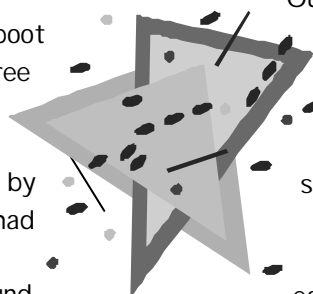
Checking the visitors' book at the end of the year showed that there were 650 signatures compared with 620 in 2002. But there's no way of telling the actual number of visitors, because such a small percentage of them sign the book. As usual, they came from all over the world – Iceland, South Africa, USA, Japan, Australia and more or less every country in Europe. It's fascinating to read their reactions, such as : "Full of surprises"; "A wonderful surprise"; "Tranquil, it feels sacred as soon as you walk through the door"; "what a beautiful church!"

### **Events 2003**

Since the last issue of "Roond About Birsay" the trust has held three events.

In August we had a well-attended and very enjoyable gospel concert by Michael Marcus from Westray, who had just returned from a tour of Belarus.

Then in September came our main fund-raising event of the year, our 'More if You Care Fayre', held in the Community Centre and 'doon at the P'lace'. Our little gallery was open that day for the first time, and in the church there was a display of old photographs, some of them



not seen before in any of our exhibitions. If you have any old photographs that you think might be of interest, please let me know and I can have them copied, and we can perhaps have another exhibition.

In December we had our Christmas

concert which featured tenor Craig Downes.

Thanks to the pupils of Evie school, we acquired – albeit temporarily – another



five stained-glass windows. The effect when it was dark outside was really beautiful. The Birsay Church Flower Club, the Dounby Guides and the Birsay Drama Group helped in other ways with decoration of the church. Craig's programme was mainly of Christmas songs, greatly enhanced by the beautiful accompaniments of Iain Campbell. Dounby School Choir and the Birsay Drama Group added variety to the program.

In September, Trudi Newton held an evening of community hymn singing, with solos by Barbara Grieve, to help raise funds for her year in Malawi. We would welcome other individuals or groups holding events in St Magnus. Contact me on 721241.

### **Events 2004**

Our programme of events will begin earlier than usual this year, with a Gospel Concert by the Sandwick Singers on March 21<sup>st</sup>. Their first Gospel Concert in St Magnus was in October 1997, and I still remember it vividly. I'm sure the reputation of the Sandwick Singers will ensure a capacity audience. Get there early!

On 16<sup>th</sup> April we will have our annual St Magnus Day service of Praise. The special feature this year will be a short piece about Magnus as a boy, foreseeing his future. This has been composed by Gemma McGregor, and will be

performed by five or six boys from the Orkney Children's Choir.

The annual Jazz Festival Service is one of the most popular events of the year. It will take place on 25<sup>th</sup> April, and by popular demand, the speaker will again be Bill Crichton.

There are going to be quite a few events in June to commemorate the installation of the stained-glass window and the re-dedication of the Church in June 1904. There will be two

special services, following the pattern of 1904, but there will also be a concert of Scottish music.

The Orkney Ramblers' Club is organising a series of walks which will cover the route along which the body of Magnus was carried, first from Tingwall to Birsay, and then from Birsay to Kirkwall. Further details will be given nearer the time.

Bertie Harvey



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## Birsay Heritage Trust

### THE BARONY MILL:

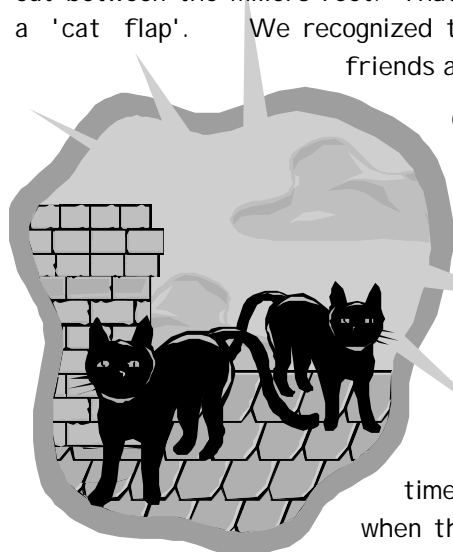
The Mill had a good season, with some 1600 visitors including more school children this year. As Readers may know we did not charge admission, hoping donations would make up the shortfall. In amount donations did match the fees collected in 2002, but just. We expect to suspend admission fees again this year, so PLEASE COME, bring visitors and BUY BERE.

Speaking of meal, the Miller wishes to inform the Readers that he has for sale some WINTER WHEAT grown in Orkney and ground at the Mill, and he expects to receive OATS that he will grind. What a fine opportunity for you to experiment with multigrain breads including bere as well. Nothing is more tasty than fresh homemade bread!!

Sara Zabriskie interviewed Mrs. Furblack, Mill Cottage, who kindly supplied the following reminiscences.

### WHERE HAS HOGMANAY GONE?

When I was a 'peedie bairn'... All right 'peedie ball of fur'. Anyway, as I was saying, when I was little, Hogmanay was the best time of year. When the folk of Mill Cottage put on their coats, shoved a bottle in a pocket, turned out the light and closed the door, Mother would give us the sign and we'd scamper out between the millers feet. That was before they invented a special door for us. Something they call a 'cat flap'. We recognized the signs and knew it must be midnight and time for us to visit our friends as well. 'First-pawing' Mother called it.

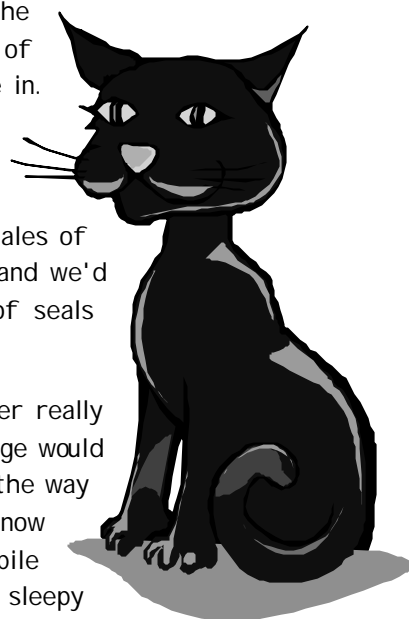


Our first stop was the Mill across the road just in case someone came to visit us there. Then it was on to the Boardhouse farm. We kittens especially liked to visit the farms as there were always lots of kittens for us to play with while the older cats sat around lapping from the bowl of milk that the farmer's wife set out for good luck - our good luck I'm sure. They talked about how the year and been: sunny days for naps, how many mice they caught, how big the rats were, friends that 'passed on' - adult things. We'd play with each other and then surprise Mother by jumping on her, though she didn't always approve of that. Some times the older cats would tell stories from many generations ago, like when that nasty man lived in the big house they call a palace in the village.

But he isn't there anymore and the big house is all in ruins. That's what happens to you when you aren't good mother used to tell us. There were even stories about men who came in the long boats from out where the sky meets the sea and lived on the island out in the bay. But

that was long, long ago. We loved to listen to the stories though we really didn't believe them. Now when I tell my own kittens those stories, I think I do believe.

Well after a nice long visit we'd stroll along the burn toward the village stopping at Walkerhouse along the way. There was a nice tabby who lived there. She was sort of shy, getting along in years and always stayed out of sight. She caught lots of mice and used to line them up on the step outside the door, hoping the folk inside would think she was one of those 'good trows' her own mother had told her old folk used to believe in. Visiting with her deep inside the barn was always fun. First we had to find the opening to the tunnel under the hay to get to the back in the corner where she lived. But she always had a little 'nip' to liven up our visit. We kittens would curl up next to her and listen to her wonderful tales of what it was like long ago. Sometimes her purring would put us to sleep and we'd dream of adventures of slaying sea dragons, catching giant rats and of seals dancing on the shore.



After tabby's visit we'd continue down the burn to the village. We never really got farther than the village that first night. Most of the cats in the village would gather by one of the houses where they were out of the wind and out of the way of the many feet that seemed to be travelling along the garden walls. By now we kittens were usually very sleepy and we could curl up in a corner in a pile while Mother visited with her many friends. Being winter and the sun so sleepy himself, visiting went on for a long time. Eventually the lazy sun would rise and everyone had to start for home again. It may be a special day, but the farmers family still had to take care of their animals. So we'd hurry back to the barn and byre to make sure any mice or rats that were around knew we were still in control.

But, times have changed. I heard the miller the other day talking to someone who had stopped in for beremeal. They were saying so much home brew any more calling like they used to.



it's hardly worth making as people don't come There was to be a big

party at the Hall again this year and we thought we'd go, but then all the lights went out. Don't know why people are

bothered by that. We can see in the dark. Why

can't they? Anyway, we didn't wait for the miller and his wife to

leave. We just slipped out through the cat flap and headed across to the Mill. There were no cars on the road at all and we thought maybe we had the wrong night. No, the cat from Wattle Cottage told us, it was indeed Hogmanay. She was planning to go 'first pawing' with us and had on the strangest hat with bells and flashing red lights. "Too windy," she said as she padded back to Wattle. It wasn't long before I had to grab two of my kittens with my teeth as they were being rolled around by the wind. Cat o'Wattle was right. It was too windy for the peedie ones and back to Mill Cottage we went. So, if we didn't get to wish you a 'Happy New Year', we wish you that now.

Mrs. Levi Furblack, C.A.T.



## NEWS FROM ORKNEY VINTAGE CLUB

The twenty-first year of Orkney Vintage Club's existence has just passed into the history books. No special events were held to mark the occasion, although a second book of stories from the newsletters is at the planning stage and will, hopefully, be ready for next year's Christmas market. I'll keep you posted. When I last wrote, the rally was coming up, although it was actually past before '*Roond About Birsay*' came out. Heavy rain in the morning had a lot of worried-looking stewards glancing skywards and hoping we weren't going to have a 'wash-out'. Thankfully it cleared, and the rest of the day went off as planned. From the inside, it is always difficult to judge the success of the rally, but reports from the general public indicate that it lived up to expectations. Exhibitor numbers were similar to 2002, although the gate was down by about a quarter. It still enabled us to give Orkney Disability Forum a donation of £1000. This was in return for the excellent job they made of parking the cars in the field across the road from the Rally.

Just prior to the Rally, the Club had their usual display at the Dounby Show. Two of the tractors were from Birsay - Peter Stokes' 1954 Ferguson TE-F20, and Ali Clouston's Massey Ferguson 135, which was purchased new by James Firth of Leary in 1970 and was recently restored by Duncan Hay. The show also gave the wider public a first chance to see Ron Marwick's latest creation, the 1927 Ford Model T Fordor.

The Club had another good day at the Orkney Science Festival Mini Rally, when 13 cars, 7 tractors and 5 stationary engines were displayed on Broad Street and on the Kirk Green in front of St Magnus Cathedral. An innovation was a Tractor Run that took place mid-afternoon. The chosen route was out to Scapa via the Old Road and back via the New Road. A similar run, over a different route, is planned for this year. We must also chase up a few motor cycles and some more

engines. We are one of very few organisations that have Broad Street closed for them and we must continue to support this important showpiece for the Club on behalf of the Science Festival.

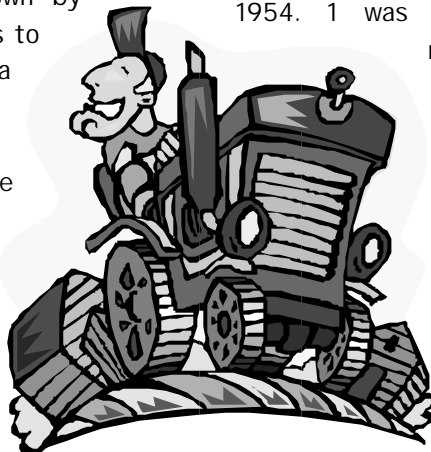
The last Road Run of the year took place in mid September, when seven cars and two motorcycles set off from Kirkwall destined for Inveraim in Toab, where Leslie Foubister was waiting to greet us. Leslie has always supported the Rally with displays of agricultural implements and bygone, and his collection is well worth a visit. The restored horse implements and other farming machinery are all arranged and displayed on the lawn. He has more agricultural memorabilia indoors. The set of match-harness hanging in the conservatory was last used by Leslie at the East Mainland Ploughing Match at Comley, Toab, in 1954. I was particularly impressed with the research he has done on Ploughing Matches - he has the results of every match that has appeared in the press, and all are neatly catalogued in folders. This was a mammoth undertaking in itself.

My year as Chairman ended at the AGM in November, when I handed the reins over to Donnie Grieve. After the business was over, Alistair Tulloch and I were

given a presentation of engraved glass tankards to mark twenty-one years of the Club. It was very unexpected, and I think we both said in reply that we never realised what we were starting all those years ago.

This year's newsletter has been printed and is ready to issue to members when they join or renew their subscriptions for the current year. It is sixty pages long and contains the usual mix of reports on Club events along with other stories compiled especially for the newsletter. Among the latter, Tommy Matches has written the story of 'Another Birsay Shipwreck', this time on the tragedy of the steam trawler 'Freesia' from Grimsby.

Membership is still only £5.00 for adults and



£1.00 for juniors (16 and under). I usually collect subscriptions in this area, so if any readers would like to join, you can contact me on 771373.

On behalf of the Club, may I take this opportunity

to thank those involved with 'Roond About Birsay' for all the work they do in producing the newsletter. I wish them all the best for 2004.

Submitted by Harold Esson



## BIRSAY CHURCH FLOWER CLUB

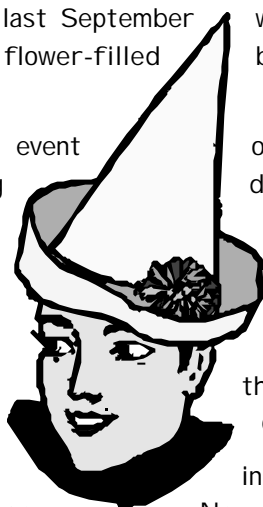
The ladies of the Birsay Church Flower Club have been enjoying their usual full and varied programme of activities. Back in the summer we had a trip out on a glorious sunny day to visit gardens at Herston and Burray, rounding off the day with a meal at the Sands Motel.

Our stall at the "More if you care Fair" last September worked hard to provide a selection of flower-filled and bulbs galore for the gardeners.

A number of members attended an event in October. A team of visiting on the theme 'Aurora Borealis' and Our annual Open Night in November was an entertaining evening with visiting Aitken.

The Christmas party in December was games, make silly hats and share a

The Flower Club continues to be involved in a programme of activities throughout the year. to attend our meetings, which normally take place on the third Tuesday of each month at 7.30pm at the Twatt Church Hall.



was a blaze of colour. Members had baskets for sale and there were plants

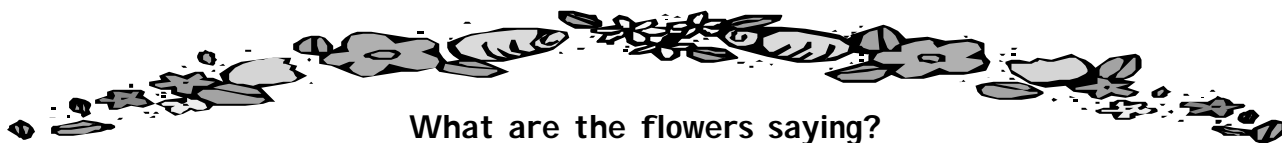
organised by Stromness Flower Club in demonstrators gave an evening exhibition tutored workshops the following day.

well supported and we enjoyed an demonstrators Jan Moar and Alison

the ideal opportunity to have fun, play delicious supper.

in local activities and has an interesting New members and guests are always welcome

Barbara Nieto, Secretary Tel. 721413



## What are the flowers saying?

Outside in your garden the quiet plant world is busy. Secret, coded messages are being broadcast everywhere but there are only a few who understand them. Birsay is justifiably known as the Garden of Orkney and the flowers are talking.

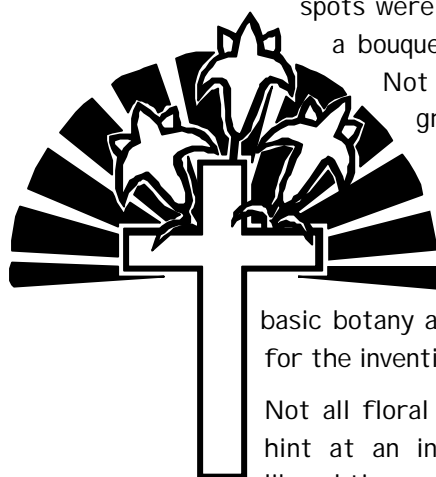
Floragraphy is the rather grand sounding name for the application of flower symbolism, or more simply, the language of flowers. Using flowers as a means of conveying messages is a method of communication, which dates back centuries. There are many variations in this language as every tradition accommodates local plant species, folklore and legend.

Some of the associations are quite clear and easy to understand. For example, orange blossom is often carried by brides and symbolises virginity. The scent of orange blossom is known to have a very calming

effect and no doubt helps to soothe the bride's nerves, so its association with weddings is not surprising.

In the Middle Ages the rules of courtly love imposed constraints on the behaviour of respectable ladies and their suitors. This was also a time when very few people would have been able to read or write fluently, so messages were discreetly passed using the code of flowers. A man sending white carnations offered to love and serve his lady. She might welcome his attention by responding with pansies or sweet peas or rebuff his advances with daffodils or yellow chrysanthemums.

Flower messages were by no means always pleasant. Sending flowers with spots of colour on their petals was considered an insult. We may welcome bright tiger lilies and mimulus in our gardens but their spots were once considered synonymous with disease. Sending spotted flowers in a bouquet was the equivalent of wishing the pox on the unfortunate recipient. Not surprisingly, the gift of a bunch of nettles was a sign that one had greatly offended the sender.



Today we are surrounded by numerous quick and easy methods of communication so it is quite hard to imagine life without postal deliveries, text messaging, e-mail etc. It is also clear that messages could be misunderstood unless both parties were well-versed in basic botany and employed the same code. Modern lovers have cause to be grateful for the invention of the telephone.

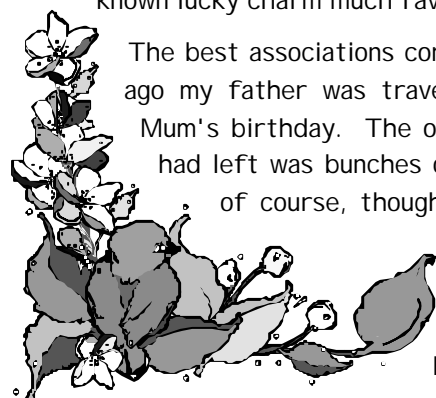
Not all floral messages were associated with romance and courtship. Flowers could hint at an individual's religious or political sympathies, especially useful in less liberal times when being seen to be on the "wrong" side might cost you dearly.

White lilies, traditionally associated with the Virgin Mary were often to be found in the gardens of monasteries. Catholic sympathisers planted them near their houses to indicate that priests might seek shelter there in times when the practice of their faith and the celebration of Mass were banned. Of course nobody could be indicted for having a few lovely flowers growing on their land but the code would have been clearly understood.

Some flowers have remained firm favourites over the years. St Valentine's day would just not be the same without red roses and their message of enduring love. How many romances would never have got going without the blessing of the Christmas mistletoe and its tacit permission to steal a kiss?



Some flowers are believed to have magical properties and may be used as talismans or charms. In Wales and the Isle of Man either a rowan or an elder tree is planted near a new house to provide shelter for the good fairies and protect against bad luck. A sprig of white heather is a well-known lucky charm much favoured at weddings and by race goers.



The best associations come from events and flowers shared with family or friends. Many years ago my father was travelling home and remembered, somewhat late in the day, that it was Mum's birthday. The only flowers he could find were from a wayside stall and all the vendor had left was bunches of Sweet William. So he came home with a bucket full of them. Mum, of course, thought they were just beautiful and planted Sweet William in the garden every year after.

Next time you are working in the garden or choosing blooms for a special occasion remember that flowers are not only beautiful to look at, they really can talk.

## CLIMATE DATA SUMMARY FOR 2003

	<u>JAN</u>	<u>FEB</u>	<u>MAR</u>	<u>APR</u>	<u>MAY</u>	<u>JUN</u>	<u>JUL</u>	<u>AUG</u>	<u>SEP</u>	<u>OCT</u>	<u>NOV</u>	<u>DEC</u>	2003 <u>MAX/MIN</u>	2003 <u>TOTAL</u>	2003 <u>AV</u>	50 year <u>TOT/AVRG</u>
MAX TEMP °C	10.8	11.0	14.5	21.1	18.8	19.6	24.5	26.5	20.0	14.2	13.7	12.0	26.5			
<i>Date</i>	14	24	28	17	28	25	17	6	17	1	5	18	06-Aug			
Mx Temp Mean	6.8	7.0	10.2	12.3	13.0	16.4	18.6	17.7	15.4	10.7	9.8	7.5			12.1	10.1
Min Temp °C	-6.4	-3.2	-3.8	-0.4	-0.4	5.6	7.0	7.5	3.2	-1.4	-2.9	-8.0	-8.0			
<i>Date</i>	8	15	19	13	16	5	6	11	24	22	24	30	30-Dec			
Min Temp Mean	1.7	1.3	2.7	5.3	6.3	9.6	11.7	11.7	8.3	5.1	4.0	1.8			5.8	5.4
MIN GRASS °C	-10.4	-8.0	-8.7	-5.5	-3.0	1.5	6.0	5.2	-0.1	-4.4	-6.3	-13.0	-13.0			
<i>Date</i>	8	15	19	13	16	3	6	25	24	22	23:24	30:31:00	30-Dec			
RAINFALL mm	132.1	36.3	48.8	40.9	72.6	48.9	56.9	52.9	89.2	68.3	95.9	102.2		845.0		998
RAIN (MAX)	15.0	8.8	12.5	16.1	10.9	8.7	16.2	15.2	15.2	10.2	20.0	10.5		20.0		
<i>Date</i>	24	1	1	28	12	22	21	20	24	20	29	31		29-Nov		
SUNSHINE hrs	30.8	53.4	131.9	182.1	167.7	166.1	165.5	163.4	125.3	99.9	66.0	18.5		1408.1		1157.8
SUN (MAX)	5.7	8.6	9.1	13.4	12.6	15.6	15.7	11.3	11.1	8.9	6.1	3.1		15.7		
<i>Date</i>	7	18/24	17	20	16	26	16	5	14	22	22	11		16-Jul		
WIND MAX kn	64.3	54.8	57.4	42.6	43.5	43.5	33.0	44.3	40.0	60.0	57.4	61.7	64.3			
<i>Date</i>	15	4	30	01:02	07:08	18	15	22	25	10	18	31	15-Jan			
AV SPEED kn	14.2	13.6	9.4	10.9	10.1	10.0	8.3	9.3	8.9	13.0	10.9	11.0			10.8	
AV DIR	SW	SSE	S	SSE	SE	SE	SSE	N	SW	NW	S	S			SSE	
GALE DAYS	3	2	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	nil	2	1	3		11		
<i>Date</i>	15/28/29	03:04	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	07:10	18	14:28:31				
WIND CHILL °C	-11.2	-8.2	-4.6	-4.4	-4.7	2.5	4.5	4.4	-1.7	-3.7	-3.7	-8.7	-11.2			
<i>Date</i>	30	4	17	10	16	7	6	31	23	11	23	30	30-Jan			
BAR MAX mb	1031.1	1035.2	1040.5	1036.5	1022.8	1021.2	1018.2	1027.0	1025.7	1033.8	1032.4	1037.1	1040.5			
<i>Date</i>	10	15	17	18	27	14	5	27	3	15	8	6	17-Mar			
BAR MIN mb	971.2	971.8	988.4	987.1	989.2	995.3	997.2	992.9	995.9	982.9	972.5	969.3	969.3			
<i>Date</i>	21	3	11	1	8	18	25	22	22	6	2	27	27-Dec			