

# "Roond Aboot Birsay"

News for and by the people of Birsay

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September 2006

Issue 29

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## Editorial

Well, that's the summer gone once more so it must be time for the autumn issue of your favourite newsletter. The best thing about it is that even if it is rubbish, it is free rubbish. This year marks the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the sinking of the HMS Hampshire and the death of Lord Kitchener and Robbie Gaudie has very kindly contributed a project done by Erica Kemp, one of his grand daughters, for which she received a "Highly Commended" certificate in the Orkney Heritage Society Fereday Prize for Local Studies. Thanks to Robbie for contributing this most topical article and also thanks as ever to everyone else who contributed.

Johnny Johnston - Still Editor since no-one else wants the job.

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## Birsay Community Council

I've just been having a look at the last issue to see what progress has been made on the things I wrote about then and very little seems to have happened in many cases. For example, we still do not have new toilets in Dounby neither do we have the new bowling green. Still, these things take time so we will wait and see, as we are well used with doing. Neither do we have a new Orkney flag, although I believe people have been sending in their preferred designs. I suppose you could add to the list the new Air Ambulance Service, since it does not seem to be a resounding success except, perhaps, in the eyes of those at the head of it. We are also still waiting for Pentland Ferries new catamaran and it will be interesting to see what difference, if any, it makes to Northlink or CalMac or whatever they might be calling themselves by then.

Waste management is still an important issue. We were recently shown a DVD on how Orkney manages its waste and what can be reused or recycled. There is still no definite date for the new permanent amenity site but I have no doubt that it will get a mixed reception if and when it does come since many people are highly delighted with the temporary recycling unit in Dounby, especially since there is also a garden refuse skip there now as well.

We are having a bit of a problem at the moment with Scottish Water since no water is coming down the burn from the dam at Hunto and, of course, this means no water at the Barony Mill as well. We understand this is being caused by a build up of silt and weeds

creating an artificial dam which is preventing the water from reaching the actual dam now that the loch level is a bit low due to the recent dry spell. Scottish Water do not seem to agree with us (nothing new there) but they have agreed to remove some of the silt and weeds and indeed by the time this newsletter comes out, it may well all be sorted.

Finally, a problem has arisen over rights of way or rights of access at Beachview (now re-named Mithlond). Public rights of way or access has always been a very difficult subject but we are looking into this at the moment and we hope to come to a mutually acceptable agreement soon.

As always, you know who we are and where to find us if you have anything to talk about.

**Johnny Johnston - Chairman**

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## **HORATIO HERBERT KITCHENER**

Horatio Herbert Kitchener was born on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 1850, the third of a family of five children on a farm in Southern Ireland. The eldest was Henry (born in 1846) who eventually succeeded to the earldom, then came a daughter Frances, who was nicknamed "Millie." Then came the future field marshal, then Arthur who was a scientist, and lastly Walter who became a major general after varied service. The children were close in age. Two years separated each of the first four; Walter, the baby of the family, was the youngest by four years. Frances, although a girl, was a match for the boys at all their childhood games. The only one who did not make great efforts to maintain himself was the future commander-in-chief.

As their father did not believe in the excellence of boarding schools, he enforced a series of tutors. The education given was essentially modern. While his tutors were translating Latin and Greek texts and making up fairly good verses in those languages, Kitchener was allowed to concentrate on maths, history, geography, French and German. This was accompanied by some instruction in the theory and practice of farming. In his education Kitchener seemed to have shared the disadvantages which Churchill had experienced.

Kitchener's father decided to send him and his brothers abroad, no doubt telling him that it would be an educational experience. The boys were packed off to Geneva in Switzerland, where they enjoyed a thorough schooling. They returned to London to be "finished off" by an army instructor. At the age of eighteen, Herbert entered the Royal Military Academy, but became bored by the day-to-day life there. Two years later, he visited his father who had remarried and moved to France. There he saw images of French soldiers singing heroic songs before going into battle. In a fit of enthusiasm he offered his services to the French Army and was afterwards enlisted to fight several battles.

### **EGYPT, SUDAN and KHARTOUM**

Kitchener won fame on his second tour in Sudan (1886-1899), being made Aide de camp to Queen Victoria and collecting a Knighthood of the Bath. After becoming Sirdar of the Egyptian Army he headed the victorious Anglo-Egyptian army at the battle of Omdurman on September 2 1898, a victory made possible by the massive rail construction he had instituted in the area. Kitchener quite possibly stopped war between France and Britain when he dealt firmly but non-violently with the French military expedition to claim

Fashoda, in what became known as the Fashoda Incident. He was created Baron Kitchener of Khartoum and of Aspall in the County of Suffolk, on November 18<sup>th</sup> 1898 for his successes and began a programme restoring good governance to the Sudan. The programme had a strong foundation based on education, Gordon Memorial College being its centrepiece, and not simply for the children who were local - children anywhere could apply to study.

He ordered the mosques of Khartoum to be rebuilt and instituted reforms which recognised Friday - the Muslim holy day - as the official day of rest, and guaranteed freedom of religion to all citizens of the Sudan. He went so far as to prevent Christian missionaries from attempting to change Muslims to Christians.

Kitchener rescued a substantial charitable fund which had been diverted into the pockets of the Khedive of Egypt and put it to use improving the lives of the ordinary Sudanese.

### **THE BOER WAR**

During the second Boer war (1899-1902), Kitchener arrived with Lord Roberts and the massive British reinforcements in December 1899. Kitchener was made overall commander in November 1900 following Roberts' removal due to illness. Following the defeat of the normal Boer forces, and the failure of a reconciliatory peace treaty in February 1901, which Kitchener had talked over with the Boer leaders, Kitchener inherited and expanded the successful strategies designed by Roberts to crush the Boer fighters. One of the Boer Commanders most unbelievable tactics was to steal the uniforms of captures troops and disguise themselves as British soldiers in order to gain a tactical advantage in battle. In response Kitchener ordered that any Boer found wearing British uniforms were to be sentenced to death, confirmed by the commanding officer. This order, which Kitchener later denied issuing, led to the famous "Breaker" Morant case in which several Australian soldiers, including the celebrated horseman and bush poet Lt. Harry and "Breaker" Morant, were arrested and court-martialled for summarily executing Boer prisoners and civilians, including children and Africans and also the murder of a German missionary. Morant and another Australian, Lt. Peter Handcock, were found guilty and killed by firing squad at Petersburg on February 27<sup>th</sup> 1902. Their death warrants were personally signed by Kitchener.



## WORLD WAR ONE

At the outset of World War 1, Prime Minister Herbert Henry Asquith quickly had Lord Kitchener appointed Secretary of State for War. Against cabinet opinion, Kitchener correctly predicted a long war that would last about three years. It would require huge armies to defeat Germany, and suffer huge casualties before the end would come.

A huge recruitment campaign began, which soon featured a distinctive poster of himself taken from a magazine front cover. It has proved to be one of the most enduring images of World War 1 and could have encouraged large numbers of volunteers.

In an effort to find a way to relieve pressure on the Western front, he proposed an invasion of I skenderun with ANZAC, New Army and Indian troops. Alexandretta was an area with a large Christian population and was the centre of the Ottoman Empire's railway network – its capture would have cut the empire in two. Yet he was eventually persuaded to support Winston Churchill's disastrous Gallipoli campaign in 1915-1916. That failure, combined with the shell crisis of 1915, dealt Kitchener's political reputation a heavy blow. He offered to resign but Asquith refused, although the responsibility for munitions was moved to a new ministry headed by David Lloyd George. In May 1916, preparations were made for Kitchener and Lloyd George to visit Russia on a diplomatic mission. Lloyd George was otherwise engaged with his new Ministry so it was decided that Kitchener would go alone.

A week before his death, Kitchener confided to Lord Derby that he intended to press relentlessly for a peace of reconciliation, regardless of his position, when the war was over, as he feared that the politicians would make a bad peace.

On June 4<sup>th</sup> 1916, he personally answered questions asked by politicians about his running of the war. They learned that at the start of the war, Kitchener had placed huge orders for munitions with American companies, who had delivered 480 of the 2,000,000 rifles ordered. He received a resounding vote of thanks from the 200+ MPs who had come to question him. Sir George Arthur, who only a week before had introduced a failed vote of censure in the House of Commons, personally seconded the motion.

## KITCHENER'S DEATH

At Scapa Flow, Kitchener embarked aboard the cruiser HMS *Hampshire* for his mission to Russia. On June 5<sup>th</sup> 1916, while en route to the Russian port of Arkhangelsk, HMS *Hampshire* hit a German mine during a force 9 gale and sank off Marwick Head, west of the Orkney Islands. Kitchener, his staff and 643 of the crew of 655 were drowned or died of exposure. His body was never found. The same day, the last division of Kitchener's new army crossed the Channel to take up its position in Flanders and France where eventually, despite numerous setbacks, they helped to defeat Germany in 1918. Following his death, the town of Berlin, Ontario, Canada, was renamed Kitchener in his honour. Mount Kitchener in the Canadian Rockies was also named in his honour. A memorial was built in his honour on the nearby cliffs at Marwick Head, Birsay.

A month after his death the Lord Kitchener National Memorial Fund was set up by the Lord Mayor of London to honour his memory. It was used to aid casualties of the war, both practically and financially. When the war ended, the fund was used to enable university educations for soldiers, ex-soldiers and their sons, a function it continues to perform today.

## EYE WITNESS ACCOUNT of the SINKING of HMS HAMPSHIRE

This information was obtained from a tape recording made by Ernest W. Marwick in 1966, fifty years after HMS Hampshire sank. It is a recording of my Great Grandfather, Mr James Gaudie of Netherskaill, Marwick who witnessed the cruiser sinking in 1916. He was born in 1883 and lived all his life at Netherskaill. He would have been 83 when the recording was made. My mother, Mabel Kemp, remembered hearing a recording of her Grandfather doing this interview at her uncles house when she was a little girl but had no idea where the recording came from or who it belonged to. After contacting the Archives Department of Orkney Library, they knew the recording we were meaning and let us have a copy of it.

Erica Kemp.

When did you first see the ship? Before 8 o'clock off Marwick Bay.

Did you pay any particular attention to her then? Not really, but you always looked any ships passing.

What happened then? I went back to the work I had been doing and after a few minutes I heard an explosion. I thought something must have happened to the ship, so I went up to the top of the Marwick cliffs.

How long did that take you? It can't have been more than 10 minutes or a quarter of an hour. By that time half the ship was under water. Her bow was under the water.

What was happening? I couldn't really see because she was too distant but I reckoned she must have been at least a mile and a half off shore.

Was it hazy? It was hazy and raining and a hash of sea and a damp, raw fog but I could see her distinctly.

Was the sea breaking on her? Oh yes, just like she had been a reef of rocks.

What did you do? I went back to the farm to raise the alarm but I found out that word had already been sent to the authorities. I then went back to the top of the cliff but by then the ship was much lower in the water. It looked like she was resting on the bottom of the sea and the sea was still breaking over her. After a minute she just disappeared. Then I saw what looked like boats leaving the ship but we found out later it was rafts. I stayed there for quite a long time but we thought it was not possible for anything to land or come near where we were. The direction of the wind and weather was drifting them off the land as far as we were concerned.

Were you able to keep the rafts in view? Only for a very short time.

And they were going south? Yes they were going south.

Did you stay for quite a while? Yes I stayed as long as I could see anything but darkness was coming down. And it was no use staying there as there would be nothing come ashore there.

Did you see the armed forces? Nobody.

And you only heard the following day what had happened? We knew perfectly well what had happened.

No, with regard to survivors and so forth. Well, we didn't reckon there would be any survivors.

You thought it would be impossible in that sea? Yes, impossible that it could be the case.

And even 12 surviving, does that seem something of a miracle? It was a miracle right enough.

But more could have been saved if the authorities had been quicker? If they had taken action immediately.

Thank you Mr Gaudie.

### **Could more lives have been saved?**

My Grandad, Robert Gaudie, who was the youngest son of James Gaudie, was always told that they found out later that many men were in the sea and coming ashore at the Bay of Skail or north of the Bay of Skail. The army was there and threatened to shoot any of the locals who tried to help any men out of the sea. The locals were allowed to help any men who made it ashore by themselves. Many more could have been saved if the locals had been allowed to go into the sea to help, as many of the men were too exhausted to make it to shore by themselves and died before reaching dry land. The truth about what really happened that night remains a secret to this day.

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## KITCHENER'S MEMORIAL

Kitchener's Memorial was erected on the cliffs of Marwick Head in 1926. It was the nearest point of dry land to where the HMS Hampshire sank. The stone was quarried from the cliffs at Marwick Head, which must have been a very dangerous job considering the cliffs are around 250 feet high! It is approximately 80 feet high and is a square pillar in shape. Inside the sides are parallel the whole way up but outside it is tapered from about 6 feet up. On the top are square pillars with larger pillars at the corners. A Mr Liddle from Orphir had the contract to erect the memorial and it was constructed with the help of lots of local men. The people of Orkney raised the money for the project and it was estimated to cost £7,000. My Grandad remembers it being said that the men had quite a job on very windy days as the scaffolding would blow down! It was officially opened in the summer of 1927, which was a very hot day. A huge crowd had gathered at the top of the cliffs and the exertion of walking up the steep hill proved too much for some, who fainted on reaching the top. It originally had a hardwood door with a brass latch, so people could go inside. Today the cliffs are one of the most popular attractions for bird watchers. The public started using the memorial as a public toilet and approximately 40 years ago the door was built up with stone to match the rest of the memorial.

### HMS Hampshire

The HMS Hampshire was an armoured cruiser of the Devonshire class, built for the Royal Navy. She was constructed at the Chatham dockyard in Kent and commissioned in 1905 at a cost of around £900,000. She struck a mine at around 19.40 on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1916. The mine was believed to be one of those laid by U-75 on May 23<sup>rd</sup>. She lies at Lat. 59°7.03' and Long. 3° 23.76'. She weighed 10,850 tons. She was 473.5 ft. (144m) long, 68.5ft. (20.9m) and had a draft of 24ft. (7.3m) She had a top speed of 22 knots (41km/h) She was armed with four 7.5in. (191mm) guns, six 6in. (152mm) guns, two 12-pounder (5kg), eighteen 3-pounder (1.4kg), and two 18in. (457mm) torpedo tubes. The wreck was declared a war grave. She lies in about 65 to 70 metres of water, approximately one to one and a half miles off Marwick Head, Birsay. In 1983, one propeller and part of a drive shaft were illegally salvaged. The propeller was later given to Lyness Museum after protests.



HMS Hampshire

## **BIRSAY CHURCH FLOWER CLUB**

At the Annual General Meeting on 20 June, Renee Isbister was elected as the new president when Cindy Miller regretfully gave up the post.

The first event of the New Year was the **Club Outing to Rousay**. Arriving in Rousay, we were met at the pier by a mini bus, and went first to Trumland. The gardener who showed us round had a large amount of information to give us regarding the restoration of the woodland walk and the formal gardens. Seeing "work in progress" enabled us to really appreciate the huge amount of work already done.

A trip round the island included a stop at Marion Clarke's shop to look round their garden and tree plantings. Unfortunately Rousay strawberries had succumbed to the unusually hot weather and were not available.

Sailan, the garden of Jenny and Ronald Mainland, was the next stop and here we enjoyed the lawns and flowers by the burn before being much impressed by their vegetables.

Following a delicious lunch at the Pier Restaurant, it was just a short walk up the village to visit Bill and Freda Murray at Rose Cottage. Here was another delightful garden with much colour, in the care of an enthusiastic and knowledgeable gardener. Altogether, a most enjoyable and inspiring day.

Now, the shows over, it is back to indoor activities and these got underway with **Rhapsody in Blue** on 15 August. Elizabeth Herdman inspired us all with her arrangements on a musical theme, portraying the singers and the orchestra in a variety of unusual containers, including a music stand. Members then followed this theme with a variety of blue containers and blue flowers, lightened with contrasts of white and yellow.

There was a replay of Rhapsody in Blue when two days later six members took the theme to Firth SWRI.

The meetings will continue with **Castaway** with Pat Kirkpatrick on 19 September and **Geometric** with Barbara Williamson on 17 October. This will be followed on **28 November (please note change of date) by the Open Night**. Diana Hendry, current president of Stromness Flower Club, will provide the programme, on a Christmas theme, and there will be a special supper.

Visitors and new members are always welcome. Come to the Open Night on 28 November. But why wait, we will be pleased to see you at any of the meetings in the Twatt Church Hall (19 September, 17 October) at 7.30 pm. No need to bring flowers – but you will have more fun if you do!

Bertha Mainland

## **BIRSAY HERITAGE TRUST**

It has been so cloudy of late that it is hard to remember what a warm, sunny day and quiet early summer we enjoyed. Quiet was the operative word at the Mill too, for we have had no water since the first week in July. The actual grinding season is yet to come but water power also runs the hoist, and this harvest's grain is coming in and must be hoisted up to the top floor for drying and storing. The problem seems to be silt



which has built up at head of the burn and which would have been removed in more sensible times. Despite not being able to demonstrate the mill's running, tourist numbers have held, with about 90 more this summer than last. Also, meal sales have done well and Rae has experimented with locally grown wheat. Groundwater's in Kirkwall offer a new biscuit using this wheat. Have you tried them?

Future operation of the Mill is still cloudy, as a younger miller assistant is urgently needed. Once again we ask your help to find someone interested in historic industry.

Frank Zabriskie, Secretary - BHT



### LUNACY

The full moon in September is the HARVEST MOON, and that is special. Normally, moonrise is nearly an hour later each night but the Harvest moon rises almost at the same time, the delay being but a few minutes. Why is that? Think of the Sun: as the seasons wear on, the Sun follows a north-south circuit, giving long summer days, and otherwise as we move through autumn into winter. The Moon follows the whole circuit, more or less, each month, moving in a day as much as the Sun does in twelve. Now the Moon is full, because she is opposite the Sun, so at the autumn equinox, when the Sun is heading south as fast as he can, the Moon, being opposite near the spring equinox, is coming north twelve times faster. So it is that "moon days" get longer and the Moon rises earlier. This very nearly offsets the normal delay. Keep watch.

### MAXIMUM STANDSTILL.

This is another word for lunatics. Did you catch the words "more or less" above? The Moon's monthly north-south excursion varies by as much as five degrees more than, or less than, the Sun's. This is the year that "more than" applies, and in the coming years, the excess will decline for nine years when the north-south excursion becomes least then return to Maximum Standstill in almost nineteen years. This excess or deficit affects the Moon's course through the sky markedly. DO you remember how high the full moon was last January? It even made the TV News. Last summer (when the Sun was high) the full Moon was so low in the sky that she just grazed the hills as seen from Brodgar and did not rise at all for the Stones of Stenness. Whether this meant anything to the Neolithic circle builders we do not know but it apparently did to the builders of the recumbent stone circles in Aberdeenshire.

We can expect some unusual sights this year as well. Did anyone see the Phantom Yacht on 18<sup>th</sup> August, just before midnight? She was on the north horizon heading west. All you could see was the huge fiery orange spinnaker. Look, she is moving eastward against the wind and rising ever so slowly from the sea. That was the last phase of the Moon, rising NE. Extraordinary. Keep watching.

Frank Zabriskie

## DOUNBY COMMUNITY SCHOOL

Monday the 28<sup>th</sup> of August 2006 saw the launch of the new Dounby Community School uniform.

At 10.30am, the whole school gathered in the games hall.

Along with all of our pupils and staff there was another group of very important people - the Friends of Dounby School.

It is thanks to the hard work of the FODS that we are now all wearing a uniform, and don't we look smart!

It has taken around a year for the whole process, from the initial questionnaires going out to parents, deciding on colours, finding suppliers and making all the final decisions which have brought us to the launch.

Mrs Morrell explained how there had been several dress codes over the years. In 1976 a coloured scarf and tie was introduced (which is still used on the website logo today), along with a school badge. Then in 1992 a school sweatshirt was the option, available in either red or navy blue, worn with a white shirt and the school tie.

It is now the start of another era with everyone in the same colour and the option of several styles to suit all.



## **BIRSAY, HARRAY AND SANDWICK CHURCHES**

A minister in Germany once struggled to get people to come to church. There were the few faithful but the rest of the village stayed away. What to do? The villagers were intrigued one day to open their paper to find in it a public notice for a funeral. Not just any funeral but the Funeral of the Church.

When the day came people's curiosity got them going. What was the minister up to? At the appointed time the church was filling. The organ played, a coffin stood at the front, there were flowers and the minister greeted everyone at the door just as normally happens at a funeral.

The service too began in the usual way with hymns and prayers and readings. People were dying to know what the coffin was for. Then the minister said: "And now I would like you to say farewell to the deceased by coming forward and paying your respects to the church by filing past."

So everyone got up and filed passed the open coffin and had a curious look inside. What do you think was in the coffin? When people looked in they looked at themselves – for in the coffin lay a mirror.

THE CHURCH is US. So do come and help run it and don't stand to watch and comment. Come to worship and love God – that will help to love your awkward neighbour.

### **Dates for your diary:**

Sunday Club is starting on 3 September with a Welcome Service in Harray

The Kirk Fair with plenty of fun for everyone will be in Harray Hall this year from 4pm – 6pm on Saturday 9 September

Birsay Guild Meetings start after the summer brake in Twatt Church 14 September at 8pm

Kirk Choir Practise at the Manse on Saturday 16 September 06 at 7pm

Soon the Boys Brigade meetings will start again in Dounby School; please contact Kenny Spence, David Hamilton or Danny Nicolson for more information

Forum meetings are for children in P4-7; contact Clare Newton

Youth Group meetings for young people of secondary school age start on 10 September; contact Janet Alexander, Susan Norquay or Andrea Price for more details

Please contact for any queries: **Andrea Price 771803**

## **DOUNBY CENTRE**

This has been another eventful year for the Dounby Centre.

1] We moved from a Pickaquoy Centre management contract to an O.I.C management contract at the end of 2005. This means that the Centre is now an O.I.C operation with a Dounby Centre Committee input. The Committee is much happier with this state of affairs as the control of the Centre is now back in the West. "Picky" was having its own problems which, although they did not affect the Dounby Centre, made things more complicated than they needed to be.

2] A Co-ordinator was appointed in the spring to run the day to day affairs of the Dounby Centre. This is a new position and it was given to Mrs Inga Craigie, who has been ably doing the job in a temporary capacity since October 2005. She is helped by James Kirkpatrick as Chief Steward and Jamie Peppitt as Relief Steward. I hope you agree that they have done a great job and we wish them all the best in the new session.

3] A new Website was put in place with up to date news. This can be accessed either through the Orkney Communities website - [http://www.orkneycommunities.co.uk/THE DOUNBYCENTRE](http://www.orkneycommunities.co.uk/THE_DOUNBYCENTRE) or by a link from our old website - <http://www.dounbycentre.org.uk> You should also be able to access us through other links i.e. Dounby Community School or O.I.C.  
Hopefully, this will be another useful source of information.

We have some other exciting items in the pipeline - a new Centre bus and more equipment for our Fitness Suite.

We will keep you posted. See you in the CENTRE!!

**Malcolm I.A.Beaton - Chairman -Dounby Centre Committee**

## **BIRSAY COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION**

The committee began this year's fund raising for a new hall with a dance in January instead of a Burn's Supper, as the previous Burn's Suppers had been poorly supported. We also had another Bingo and hope to have one again in the darker months. We then held another race night which was another success. Duncan Tullock kindly carried out the duties of compere/auctioneer and did a wonderful job keeping the laughs and money flowing all evening.

In June we held our annual Big Day Out, there was a good turnout throughout the day and for the sports at night. The day finished with a dance to the Birsay Boys in the hall. We are still holding regular Car Boot Sales on the last Sunday of every month. We have a few autumn events in the pipeline and the main event will be the community pantomime. There will be four performances in November. Thurs 23<sup>rd</sup>, Fri 24<sup>th</sup> and Sat 25<sup>th</sup> evenings and on the Saturday there will also be a matinee performance. Ticket Sales will be held in the hall on Sun 5<sup>th</sup> Nov and Mon 6<sup>th</sup> Nov, more details will be advertised in local papers, and on posters and on radio Orkney nearer the time.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone for their support and urge them to keep supporting the BIRSAY HALL.

**Caroline Atkinson, Secretary**



## THE ST MAGNUS CHURCH BIRSAY TRUST

### Summer Visitors

There have, as usual, been a great many visitors to St Magnus Kirk over the summer. The number of signatures in the visitors' book is more or less the same as last year in spite of the fact that there have been hardly any tour buses in the village. (How many have you seen in this corner of the West Mainland?)

The lack of bus tours has been compensated for by visitors to the Birsay Bay Tearoom, who often leave their cars in the village and generally spend more time looking round, encouraged, no doubt, by the fine weather.

Visitors from 28 countries have signed the book, the biggest number coming from the USA, with Norway beating Canada into second place. There seems to be an increase in the number of visitors from the Scandinavian countries. Is this possibly a result of the "Destination Viking Sagalands" project?

There have, as usual, been many comments on the atmosphere of peace. Some other comments this year are: "Jewel in a jewel (Orkney)"; "Another treasure of Orkney"; "Good to see a living Church"; "Beautiful church - what a location"; "Obviously a well-loved place". One that caught my attention is: "The atmosphere of ancient sanctity endures in this place."

### Vandalism

The number of comments showing appreciation of the church being open and welcoming is increasing but, unfortunately, that may have to change.

At some time between 16<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> August, the backs of many of the pews have been defaced with carvings and crosses, almost runic lines and other shapes, and there have been attempts to carve initials into some of the bookboards. The extent and depth of the defacements mean that it must have taken some considerable time to do, either on one occasion or during repeated visits, and it is hard to know when or how this could have taken place with so many visitors around. It would be very depressing if we had to keep the church locked but we may have to do that.

We have no thought that this was done by anyone local but if you ever see anything remotely suspicious, e.g. teenagers who you might be surprised to see showing an interest in the kirk, please let us know immediately. I know one shouldn't judge by appearances but better safe than sorry.

One way you could help would be by paying a short visit to the kirk in the summer months when it is open, perhaps when you are down at the shop or Post Office. Just take time to go in for a couple of minutes. The more often trustworthy folk go in, the less opportunity there would be for vandals.

### Wedding Memory Book

It has been suggested that we should keep a "memory book" with photographs of weddings that have taken place in St Magnus Kirk, so if you were married there and have a spare wedding photo. Please hand it to Linda Ross or Greer Norquoy (or indeed any member of the Trust) and we will try to get this started. The photos need not be just

from the time the Trust took over responsibility for the building (1997); we would be very happy to have them however old they may be.

With the photo, please give details of the date of the wedding, the names of everyone shown in the photo if it is a group, the bride's maiden name and any other details you think might be of interest.

By the time you read this, there will have been four weddings in the Kirk this year and two have already been booked for next year.

### **Events**

By now the St Magnus Day service and the Jazz Festival service are distant memories. Both were highly successful; one of our Stromness regulars thought it was the best St Magnus Day service yet and Harvey Johnston's reading of the story of Joseph in verse at the Jazz Festival service went down a storm.

The St Magnus Festival concert held in the Kirk in June was one of the first four Festival events to be sold out. The weather wasn't as good as last year but that made no difference to the general atmosphere. The goodwill generated by this event is enormous; so many people come to Orkney for the Festival for the concerts and don't leave time for sight-seeing, so a concert with a bus trip included and held in such a historic setting is something very special.

The opening of the Science Festival in St Magnus Kirk on 31<sup>st</sup> August was well attended and greatly enjoyed. The audience came from all over Orkney, from as far as the southernmost tip of South Ronaldsay. The programme was very varied with some fascinating extracts from old newspapers as far back as 1788 alongside readings from Bessie Skea, George Corrigall, Robert Rendall and George Mackay Brown. The event raised £191 in donations and the Trustees are very grateful to Howie Firth and the Committee of the Science Festival. Howie has decreed that the opening of Orkney Science Festival in Birsay is now a tradition.

We are planning a Christmas concert again this year, on 18<sup>th</sup> December, so put the date in your diaries. The format will be similar to last year's, which was very well received, and we hope to have the Bea Choir from Stromness providing the music again - not to be missed!!

2008. Yes, that's right, 2008.

One of our Scandinavian visitors this summer was Sten Möller, who organised the recital by the Chamber Choir of Uppsala Cathedral which was held in St Magnus Kirk in June 2001. He said they would like to perform here again. They will, in fact, be in Orkney in August 2008 for the commemoration of the 850<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Earl Rognvald, so I'm sure it will be possible to arrange something.

Remember, if you have any ideas for future events, we would be happy to hear about them.

**Bertie Harvey - Secretary**

## DOCTORS IN DOUNBY 1878 to 1939

Following on from the *Constitution and Rules of the Birsay, Harray and Sandwick Medical Aid Association*, which was published in the last edition of *Round About Birsay*, readers might also be interested in details of some of the doctors in Dounby during the first sixty-one years.

My grandfather and great-grandfather were both called John Johnston and farmed at Houseby, Beaquoyside, Birsay. They both kept diaries, which cover the years 1873 to 1934, and these record the names of doctors at Dounby from time to time. The Birsay Registers also contain information.

(Abbreviations used: H.D. - Houseby Diaries; B.R. - Birsay Registers)

- DR CLOUSTON H.D. - 11/08/1878 *'Bow's Linament for rheumatism ordered by Dr Clouston.'*  
- 19/06/1883 *'Paid Dr Clouston 17/6d for attendance on family.'* (Measles.  
Joanna died, aged 19) [17/6d = £58.70 today]
- DR DEVLIN H.D. - 21/10/1885 *'Dr Devlin at house seeing me.'*  
B.R. - Lionel Rupert Frederick Thomas Macleod Devlin, born on 01/02/1886, to  
Thomas Patterson Devlin, L.R.C.P., S.E.E.T., and his wife Jeannie, née Macleod.  
Married 1883 in Edinburgh.
- DR SAUNDERS H.D. - 15/11/1892 *'Paid Dr Saunders 6/- for attendance on face cut by foal.'*  
- 11/02/1897 *'At Dr Saunders roup. Bought kitchen dresser 16/- and  
candlestick 1/6d.'* [16/- = £60.48 & 1/6d = £5.67 today]  
B.R. - Marion Elizabeth Saunders, born on 27/06/1891 to Alfred Morrison Saunders,  
Medical Practitioner, and his wife Elizabeth Agnes, née Smith. Married 1890 in  
Banff.
- DR SUTTIE H.D. - 14/02/1899 *'At Dr Suttie with sore eye.'* (John made 22 visits to Dr Suttie,  
and the doctor visited him on 15 occasions)  
- 25/08/1899 *'Paid Dr Suttie £3-11/- for attendance on eye.'* [£3-11/- = £266]  
- 08/12/1910 *'At Dr Suttie's sale.'*
- DR BURNS H.D. - 05/03/1911 *'At Dr Burns about diarrhoea. Family received medicine &  
powders.'*  
- 26/03/1913 *'Dr Burns at Joanna, influenza.'*
- DR GREIG H.D. - 18/01/1914 *'Called Dr Greig to Mrs Spence, Cowan.'*  
B.R. - Robert Dudley Greig, born on 20/05/1914 to Herbert William Greig,  
Physician & Surgeon, and his wife, Barbara Paterson née Train. Married 1912  
in Kilwinning.
- DR PETERKIN H.D. - 31/08/1918 *'Getting signatures for shootings to Dr F. S. T. Peterkin, Dounby.'*  
- 20/02/1925 *'Dr Peterkin at Johnnie Spence.'*  
B.R. - Son, Gordon Peterkin, born on 30/09/1915.  
Obituary in *The Orcadian*: Frank G. T. Peterkin, M.B., Ch.B. Came to Orkney as locum  
to Dr Burns in 1913. Married Mary Burns, only daughter of Dr & Mrs Burns at Harray  
in 1913, and proceeded to Watford. Returned to Dounby in 1915. Transferred to  
Kirkwall in 1926 when he bought the practice of Dr Jolly. Died in 1939.
- DR McPHAIL Obituary in *The Orcadian*: Donald McPhail, M.B., Ch.B., L.M. Came to Eday in  
1914. Transferred to Sanday c1916. Appointed to Dounby in 1927. Married to  
Mary McDonald of Falkirk. There were two of a family, John and Netta. Dr  
McPhail died aged 53 in Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

Footnote: Two Dounby men were named after the doctors who brought them into the world. Alfie Tait (Alfred Morrison Saunders Tait) was named after Dr Saunders, and Tommy Flett (Thomas Herbert William Greig Flett) was named after Dr Greig.

**Submitted by Harold Esson**

## NEWS FROM ORKNEY VINTAGE CLUB

The shows are past and the nights are drawing in as the Vintage Club's 2006 calendar of outdoor events comes to a close. As I write, we still have the Orkney Science Festival Rally and Tractor Run to take place on Saturday 2nd September.

The final outdoor event takes the form of a Road Run and Visit to Willie Mowatt's Smiddy in South Ronaldsay, on Sunday 17th September. Past visits have been memorable occasions and anyone wishing to sample Willie's 'Smiddy Ale' should ensure they have a nominated driver for the homeward journey! This trip is weather-dependent to a great extent, as people are reluctant to take their vehicles over the Barriers if there is any spray coming over. Two years ago, a similar trip was scheduled, but only three cars that went over early made it. The later ones viewed the spray from a safe distance and finally decided to have a run through Deerness instead. This meant, of course, that there was a surplus of Willie's ale for the lucky few, and there was a very 'cheery' afternoon spent yarning beside the fire.

The club's year began on 2nd April with a Tractor Working Day at the Hall of Heddle, Firth, where there was an excellent turnout of tractors and ploughs, despite the wet spring. We had two visitors from North Yorkshire who had intended to bring up tractors, but the long range weather forecast made them decide against this. There was also a delegation from the newly-formed tractor group in Caithness and several of them got the chance to turn over the Orkney soil. The preceding weather meant that the ground was too wet to have an area ploughed in advance for cultivating purposes.

Six weeks later, on a bonnie Sunday, the Orkney Cavalcade took place. Setting off from Finstown at around 10.30am, they took the 'high road' past Redland and on to the Lyde, where they then headed north through Evie, Costa and Birsay to the first stop at the Barony Mill. Here, Rae and his assistant, Jimmy, were on hand to show everyone around and let them see the mill in operation, this being the highlight of the day for many. After visiting other places of interest, the day's outing ended with a meal at the Quoyburray Inn in the early evening. A total of eighty-six miles had been covered by most of the participants. Another outing for the motorists was a trip to Eday, where another excellent day was spent in glorious sunshine. The trip for foot passengers this year took the form of an excursion to the island of Gairsay, where the two boatloads had another interesting day.

The club's display at the Dounby Show was again on an agricultural theme. Harry Flett kindly provided sheaves to thresh, but the weather meant that only a few were put through Ronald Swanney's Scarth threshing-mill. Davie Watt also gave demonstrations on his pedal-mill. This was surely a very early form of fitness-machine. The extra sheaves were taken in to the Mart for the Rally on the Sunday.

The morning of the Rally was rather miserable, with persistent drizzly showers. However, the afternoon brightened up and the parade of vehicles around the ring went ahead as usual. The weather meant that the Indoor Display was well patronized, and the theme of Sports and Pastimes brought out a surprising amount of material. There were the usual displays by other clubs and organizations, and the whole thing was greatly enhanced by The Harray Traditional Music Group's toe-tapping music. It is a pity that there isn't enough room for an area to be set aside for dancing - the Club will have to look into this for another year. There never seemed to be a big crowd on the rally field and the gate was down quite a bit. There should, however, still be enough left, after expenses are calculated, to be able to give a sizeable donation to this year's nominated charity, the Crossroads Carers, who ably manned the public car-park all day. Many people are unaware that there are about sixty people on duty on a rally day. A rota system



operates whereby volunteers have time to themselves. Still, the Club is always on the lookout for more people to give an hour of their time on a rally day. If you can help, let us know.

The AGM is on 24th October, and Peter Hammond will be giving a talk on Rail Modelling on 7th November. A Collectors' Night is scheduled for 5th December. These meetings are open to anyone and new faces are always welcome. Meanwhile, I am already working on the next newsletter, No 24. It will include a story called *'Tara Gott'*, which tells of a murder that was committed in Birsay on 8th February, 1698, as well as one on a *'Fatal Boat Accident at Birsay'*, which took place on 24th March, 1876.

**Submitted by Harold Esson**

### **AS PER INSTRUCTIONS**

This story begins many years ago, probably in the early 1920's, and Jock was only a young lad at the time. It was springtime, that time of year when farmer's thoughts turn, not to love, but to the sowing of the crops which were to provide much of the following winter's fodder for the animals.

Jock's employer, Geordie, was suffering from ill-health and was confined to his bed with a severe attack of sciatica. Time was going past and Geordie still had a small field at the back of the hill to sow with oats. Young Jock had managed the ploughing and breaking-in of the soil without mishap and Geordie decided that the boy would be able to sow the oats on his own; after all, he was a sensible loon and had often seen it done before. Jock was given explicit instructions as to what he should do and the most important of these seemed to be that he should *'throw the oats high.'*

With this thought firmly implanted in his mind, Jock set about his task just after dinner and, when teatime came, he was well pleased with his afternoon's work. He had sown the oats and had managed to gauge the amount just about right as he only had about half a bushel left over. He had used this up on the end-rigs and on a corner of the field where the soil was rather poor. He then yoked the horse in the harrows and went over the field twice, just for good measure.

When Jock entered the house for his tea, Geordie's voice greeted him from the ben-end, *"Hoo did ye manage? I hope that ye minded on tae throw the oats high."* *"I deud that,"* Jock replied, *"some o' hid wis just comman' doon whin I gaed hid the last run o' the harrows!"*

**Submitted by Harold Esson**

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### **Birsay SWRI**

Hi. It's the SWRI here again wae our tales of what's been going on within our branch. Since the last letter our summer events have been taking place in the SWRI calendar. The Handiwork show was held as always in the Stromness Community Centre in shopping week, with a superb display of handiwork from different branches, with Birsay members gaining prizes in the show. Well done to all of them. The summer outing was a great success, with members enjoying a game of ten pin bowling, followed by a meal at the West End Hotel. Our vegetable show was in September, and the programme was done by Alex and Ruth Rosie, who explained how to show vegetables, and

Ruth showed a film show of a recent trip to various gardens in Scotland, which she had been on with the Stromness Flower Club. The winner of the cup this year was Margaret Spence.

We have the baking show in October, held in the Firth Community Centre. This competition is open to all branches, and as always I hope a good few members from Birsay will be trying, which I'm sure would please most of our families with the prospect of getting goodies that they never normally see in the cupboards!!.

For our more energetic members, there have been various walks organised over the summer, which have been well supported, and enjoyed by members from Birsay as well as other branches. We are having a fund raising pub Quiz on September 29th in the Smithfield Hotel, and as always everyone is welcome.

October is our business meeting and a change of programme had to be organised at the last minute, due to health reasons, so 2 of our newer members Jan Crisp, and Eileen Evans, have very kindly agreed to provide a programme, so we're in for a surprise, as they did not want to divulge to much information about what they are going to do, but I'm sure with their hidden talents, it will be well worth attending. With some of the committee retiring after there 3 years in office there will be a few changes, but with these changes often comes new ideas, which are always welcome.

As always, new members are also very welcome, or if you want just come as a visitor, you never know you might enjoy it, and want to join!

**Valerie Johnston - President**

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### **COUNCILLOR CHAT**

In the last newsletter I regaled you about the precarious situation the Council is in with regards to funding. There is not much change although I understand that the Scottish Executive are giving out their pre-election bribe with a £100 million between the councils in Scotland i.e. approximately half a million pounds for OIC. If this is spread across the Council then it will not add much to all the services provided by the Council.

### **CARE OF OUR OLD FOLKS.**

However the Council could spend it on "Care of the Elderly" !! - this would certainly help the situation we are in at the moment. You will have no doubt seen the press coverage of this issue. It gives me no satisfaction to say that the Council was advised of the need for significant funding for the elderly back in 2000 when Social Services proposed a plan for capital spending on the elderly throughout Orkney to try and cope with the expected increase in the number of people requiring care. Part of this plan was accomplished by the building of Smiddy Brae in Dounby and the Kalisgarth centre in Westray. However we are still severely short of residential care for the frail members of our community and those suffering from dementia. I believe that the Council can quite easily build the necessary facilities for care but when it comes to the cost of running them we have a problem.

The government have a formula which calculates how much they think Orkney should spend on social services and that comes to about £6.5 million, but in Orkney the Council spends about £11 million, which is still not enough. Up to now nobody has been able to explain to me why there is such a discrepancy. Either the government have got it wrong or the Council has got it wrong. From what the public say the council is not wrong apart from not putting more money into care of our old folks.

If we want to increase spending on care of our old folks there are basically four ways to accomplish this.

- an increase of funding from government
- increase the council tax on the people of Orkney
- take money out of other Council budgets and put it into care of the elderly
- take money from the reserves to pay for it

At the moment government cannot see that we need more funding so it is unlikely to happen, although we have entered a dialogue with government on this issue.

If we increase council tax too much then we have to ask "would the public be prepared to pay more in their council tax. If we did raise council tax above what government think reasonable, the government would probably reduce the money we receive as our annual settlement.

A transfer of money from other services is the really difficult option for councillors as there are many competing needs and some very parochial factions who want to over- resource small sections of the Orkney public.

To take money out of reserves is the easy option as we have the money and yes, we could pay for the required care. Government make big headlines about how they are looking after the older population so why do they not fund it? Also if we were to use reserves as a long term solution then these reserves would soon run out and then what would happen. More than likely we would have to shut down the services as government would not bail us out. At present the reserves are used for capital projects (building facilities etc) and providing the facilities that make Orkney an attractive place to live for the people of Orkney and those we may wish to attract to live in Orkney; they also promote employment in the islands through grants to business. However the Council does not believe the reserves should be used for the day-to-day costs of running a service which is largely governed by law and edicts from government.

### **SCAPA FLOW**

You will have noted the head lines about care of our old folks but also the prospects for more activity in Scapa Flow. The "Flow" is a real asset to Orkney but benefiting from that asset is a more difficult problem. You will have seen the news that there may be LNG gas transfer operations in Scapa Flow and another container port at Lyness. While both concepts are very worthwhile and would be a tremendous boost to the Orkney economy, why these very speculative ventures get promoted with high press coverage when they are in a very early stage of investigation is beyond me. Seems to me it only goes to get the hopes of the Orkney population up on little basis or causes consternation among those who dread such activities. To my way of thinking keep negotiations quiet until there is something concrete to tell the public.

**Keith Johnson – Councillor for Birsay and Dounby**

## Hundasaeter Weather Station

The first half of the year was drier than average but with sunshine above the 50 year Grimsetter average. Jan and Feb were warmer but March, April, May were colder than the past 6 years in Birsay. Jan and Feb were quite quiet for wind which strengthened over March, April and May. Rainfall was 13.5% below average.

<u>MONTH</u>	<u>Max Temp</u>	<u>Min Temp</u>	<u>Rain - mm</u>	<u>Sun - hrs</u>	<u>Max wind- kn</u>	<u>Av wind- kn</u>
January	11.2	-4.9	49.0	41.9	65.2	10.4
February	9.4	-4.6	56.8	54.0	48.7	10.7
March	10.0	-5.0	68.1	75.5	45.2	12.8
April	12.1	-5.0	101.8	190.0	48.7	12.6
May	21.6	0.6	57.9	223.1	47.8	11.6
June	23.5	0.8	35.0	157.4	37.4	9.5

Keith Johnson

Sept. 06

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### Footnote and Updates.

Due to the departure of our printer on his holidays just when I had finally got it ready, this issue will not be out until October. I will still call it the September issue though, since anything in it that might be called news was September news.

The build up of silt and weeds at the dam in the Boardhouse Loch has now been cleared and we are informed that it will be maintained more regularly in future. The Loch is still quite low so although there is now water at the Barony Mill, we are not running the machinery for the tourists, only as required for the hoisting up of the bere for drying and storing. There has been a good harvest this year so there should be no shortage of bere bannocks this year.

Following discussions about the rights of way or access at Mithlond (formerly Beachview), the owner of the property has now agreed to reopen the original path along the burn towards the gate to the Links. We are still looking into various aspects of rights of way etc. in Birsay.

Johnny Johnston



