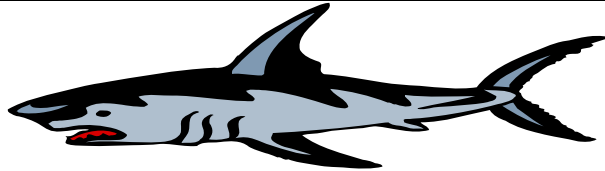


"Roond About Birsay"

News for and by the people of Birsay



October 2007

Issue 31

Editorial

So it's time for yet another edition of Birsay's favourite bedtime reading material. The offers from people wanting to take over as editor are still pouring in and I must make time soon to go through them and arrange interviews. However, you will have to make do with me again this time. What new subject can I talk about this time, I wonder? I usually mention the weather but it is hardly a safe thing to bring up this year, again. Still, I heard on the forecast at the weekend that the last week of summer was starting so maybe things will have improved by the time I get this finished. (It didn't happen !!)

Once again, I would like to thank everyone who sent in a contribution for this edition. Without you, there would be nothing but me rambling on and I think I do plenty of that in any case.

Johnny Johnston - Still Editor.

Birsay Community Council

At last there have been changes in the membership of the Community Council. About time, you may think. Nothing too drastic, though. Jean Harvey and Duncan Tullock have decided to call it a day and they have had to be replaced. We would like to thank them both for all they have done for the parish during the years they have served on the Community Council and we wish them well. Duncan is busy with his flag and we congratulate him on designing the winner. The Council now consists of the old timers, namely myself, still Chairman, Kenny Ross, still Vice-Chairman along with Sandy Scarth, Maxwell Tait and Susan Norquay and we have now been joined by Kenny Spence and Marty Hay. It is good to have new people in the Council, giving it a new outlook on things we deal with.

We also, of course, have a change of OIC Councillor for Birsay. We are all very sorry to lose Keith Johnson, who decided to retire from that position at the last elections and it shows how good he was when it takes four new Councillors to

replace him. We are now represented by Jimmy Moar, Eoin Scott, Alistair Gordon and Rob Crichton although we do have to share them with the rest of the West Mainland. Time will tell how this new system will work out. They are still in the process of getting settled in and we will eventually get some sort of rota system going so we know who we are dealing with. Maybe I'll get a comment from one or more of them for next time.

At the moment, we are just getting back in harness ourselves, with little to report except the usual ongoing items. One thing that might very well be coming up soon is the old one regarding an amenity site for the West Mainland.

Listeners to Radio Orkney some time ago might have heard a report that Kirkwall was to be getting an Amenity Site at Hatston, paid for by the funds which were allocated for the West Mainland site. The reason given was that the people out here no longer wanted it since they had their site in Dounby and many had sent in a petition to the Council asking for it to be retained. Do the OIC officials really not know that there is a difference between an Amenity Site and a Re-cycling Centre? Of course we all want to retain the Re-Cycling Centre - it is exactly what is needed in Dounby and is a great help to everyone, especially the older folk. It is **not**, however, an Amenity Site and can never take the place of one. Rest assured you have not heard the last of this subject yet.

Johnny Johnston - Chairman, Birsay Community Council

Birsay Heritage Trust

Barony Mills

The SAD FACE worn by the Barony Mill in the spring issue is now Smiling. Earlier this year it seemed that the Mill must close in summer for want of tour guides. However, Brian Johnston responded to our call for help and he and his weekend assistants, Steve Nottage from Swannay and Dave Lucas from Stromness, provide a most enjoyable and popular journey through the old-time way of life the Mill represents. Brian has indeed proved to be a real asset and has taken to the job as if he had been doing it all his life. In fact the number of visitors has increased this season.

Bere meal is still available, as is oatmeal. The weather has been no kinder to the Mill than to the rest of Orkney, with the result that the amount of corn is uncertain. However, we have plenty at the moment and Rae expects to be milling this winter as usual.



Twatt Aerodrome

There was quite a Buzz at the Twatt Aerodrome, HMS Tern. The model air show held on 2 September was a great success. Although a late addition to the Science Festival our show became the star attraction. In conjunction, the Orkney Museum Service offered a 'drive through' tour of the World War II site, but as yet that must be on a 'look-but-don't-touch' basis for liability reasons. Chairman Johnston has expressed our appreciation in the local press to Mr. Ronald Bayne and his family, to the landowner, and to all those who helped make this event happen; may I add my own thanks to those involved and to all those who expressed their support by coming. May it be the first of many such events.

The hope is that the Aerodrome can be made safe enough to allow public access. To this end, the Trust is having structural engineers evaluate the Control Tower to ascertain the cost of repairs to bring the Tower to a condition one might describe as a 'maintained ruin', similar to the Earl's Palace and other sites in Orkney. No detailed plans can be made until that report is in hand, but surely such plans would include improved access road, sign boards, and perhaps signs identifying the other building sites and remains in the old camp. There is plenty of work to do, and I appeal to anyone interested in our heritage, especially aviation, the Defence of Scapa, or Orkney's role in the World Wars to contact Johnny Johnston (771-276), Keith Johnson (771 328) or Frank Zabriskie (721 293).

Frank Zabriskie - Secretary, Birsay Heritage Trust

***** STARS AT NIGHT *****

Wow! The Milky Way has been impressive at midnight during those few clear spells. Look overhead; the band stretches from NE to SW. Prominent constellations are (starting from the NE) Auriga (a big pentagon) Perseus, Cassiopeia (the W), Cygnus (the Northern Cross) and Aquila (*, bright*, * in a row close together). Binoculars reveal a wealth of stars, clusters and nebulae. Watch how the band shifts as the year darkens.

Planets:

Jupiter has been the evening star low in the SW of late, but he will soon be going behind the Sun and won't be a morning star until spring.

Mars is in Gemini. He will be seen before sunrise, and he will be rising earlier and becoming brighter in the months to come.

Venus is very bright in the early morning in October, but fading slowly as she moves farther from Earth.

Meteor Showers: Leonids (usually 18 November, predawn), and the Geminids (13/14 December, any time at night). Showers take their name from constellations because, while the 'shooting star' can appear anywhere in the sky, if you follow the trail back it would seem to have come from a point in the constellation.

Frank Zabriskie - Harpsa, Birsay

Birsay, Harray and Sandwick Churches

The summer holidays are over, Sunday Club has started again and we are enjoying having the children back with us, who bring a liveliness, fun and laughter with them, which we adults at times forget.

On her first Sunday back one of the children was heard to say in disappointment: "Oh, you have not built the new church yet!" Ah, for the hope and optimism of a child. Many of us wish we were further on. But a lot of little steps have to be taken yet. What is the next move?

In the first two weeks of October the elders will visit all church members with a leaflet and a request for people to pledge a sum of money to be paid over four years. These moneys will not begin to be gathered in until we have the green light from 121 George Street (Church Headquarters) that they are behind our scheme.

Why pledge money for a new church building?

1. It is a fact of modern life and fundraising that we will only raise outside funding if we can show that we are willing to put our own money where our mouth is.
2. The response by members and friends of our congregation will also give us a clear indication whether people are supporting this project or whether we are barking up the wrong tree.

Why bother with a new church building when so few are interested?

We still have over 20 funerals to do per year and many enjoy a church wedding. There are still parents who value the help of the church to teach their children about God, right and wrong, spirituality and stillness in an often frantic world. Every Sunday, we have about 70-100 adults in church who come for a time of reflection, a yarn with neighbours and friends, a time of remembrance of loved ones and of searching for guidance from God.

It has been said that a cold church is like cold butter. It never spreads very well. We hope that with a new building we will be able to say to anyone, who could do with some time out, come and join our warm, comfortable place and the kind folk who run it entirely by their own voluntary labour and donations. Come, join in and make yourself at home.

Will this come about? This will depend on the response of everyone. Please, let me encourage you to help us too. Pledge forms are available from October onwards in all churches, from elders or from me.

Andrea Price 771803 - Minister for Birsay, Harray and Sandwick.

Birsay Parent and Toddler Group

The Birsay Parent Toddler Group was started at the end of June and has seen lots of parents or guardians coming along with their children to the Birsay Hall every Tuesday.

We are indebted to all those who have donated their unwanted toys for our use. There were some items which were not suitable for our use, but we will be having a table at the car boot sale in the Birsay Hall on Sunday 30th September and selling these items to raise money for our funds.

We are planning to have a Christmas party for the bairns, no date has been set yet, but we hope Santa will have time to come along.

We meet every Tuesday in the Birsay Hall from 10am - 12 noon
£1 per adult, take along a snack for your children. All welcome, and it's not just for Birsay folk.

Avril Hay - Birsay Parent and Toddler Group

St Magnus Church Birsay Trust

Presentation

At the St Magnus Day service of praise, Sara Zabriskie was presented with a framed photograph of the stained glass window to thank her for her years of service on the Trust since its inauguration in 1997. The photograph was taken by Nigel Baker, whose postcards you may have seen this summer. They are eye catching because they are slightly different from the usual - for example, Birsay Bay isn't always Mediterranean blue.

Jewellery

Mention of the stained glass window makes this an appropriate point to say that we are discontinuing our range of jewellery, based on a design for the window and made for us by Orkneying Silver Smiths. It has been much admired - far beyond our Orkney shores - but ten years is a long time for any design. There are now just five pieces left - two pairs of drop earrings and three bookmarks - and we are selling them off at a reduction of 10%, so if you would like a special present for someone, get in touch.

Festivals

We have again been fortunate to be involved with three of Orkney's most important Festivals - the Jazz Festival in April, the St Magnus Festival in June

and the Orkney Science Festival at the end of August. These all give us excellent publicity, apart from being highly enjoyable.

The Jazz Festival was led for the tenth time by Bill Salmond's Louisiana Ragtime Band and Harvey Johnston gave another virtuoso performance, this year telling the story of Moses in verse.

The St Magnus Festival concert was sold out on the first day that booking was open to the public. Harpsichord and violin sounded wonderful in the kirk and many of the pieces were very similar to what we would think of as traditional Scottish dance music. The sun came out during the concert and the audience were able to picnic outside, completely sheltered from the North wind and entertained by traditional fiddle music. Many of them asked for their thanks to be passed on to everyone in the community who had helped prepare and serve the food and make it such an enjoyable occasion for them.

HISTORY AND HUMOUR could well have been the sub-title of the Science Festival event, PLEUGH, HAY AND HAIRST. Farming traditions in the 16th, 19th and early 20th centuries were contrasted with the changes brought about by mechanisation and Brussels bureaucracy. Members of the Sandwick Young Farmers' Club took part in the performance, this being their 70th anniversary year.

Weddings

Weddings are festivals too, and we have had four in St Magnus Kirk this year. We are delighted that so many young people choose to be married in this historic building. So far we have no bookings for weddings for next year so a few proposals wouldn't go amiss!

Wedding Photographs

In a previous issue, we have said we would like to build up a collection of photographs from weddings that have taken place in St Magnus Kirk, in recent years or in the distant past, but the response has been very disappointing. We have had just one photograph. We feel a record of this kind could be very interesting for everyone so if you have a spare wedding photo, please look it out and hand it to Linda Ross, Greer Norquoy or any other member of the Trust. Soon, please.

Memories

Hilda Small, who visited the church on 30th August, had very special memories of Birsay and of the Palace in particular. She had been a Wren stationed at Twatt during the war and had tea at Janet Couper's tearoom on one occasion. Shortly after that, Janet catered for the 21st birthday of another Wren and it was at that celebration that Hilda met her future husband.

Other Visitors

30th July was a busy day. In the morning, a walking group from Abingdon in Oxfordshire visited the church. It was a very cold morning, but when I mentioned that, they said "We don't care. It's not raining"

In the afternoon, the church was visited by a group of distinguished scholars from the Arni Magnusson Institute of Icelandic Studies in Reykjavik, accompanied by the County archaeologist, Julie Gibson. After telling them briefly about the history of the church, I suggested they should have a look around and I would try to answer any questions from individuals. One lady asked if the reed organ was in working order so I volunteered to play the tune *St Magnus*. She exclaimed, as so many have done "What a wonderful acoustic!" and another said "Next time our choir goes on tour, we'll know where to come!"

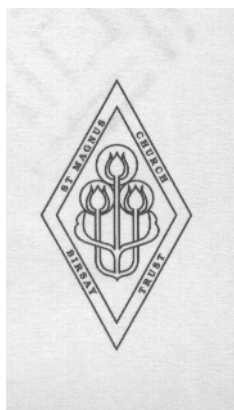
Visitor's Comments

For some reason, quite a number of visitors this year have written their comments in their own language. I've managed to make out the comments in French, German, Spanish, Italian and Norwegian, but can anyone help to translate the Faroese comment "A HUGAVERT"? Most of the comments are about the church being beautiful or peaceful but one or two are a bit longer. One Italian comment is "A step into a simple past" and a Spanish couple have written "Greetings from Barcelona to the people of Orkney".

There are, as usual, many comments on the wall hanging made by pupils from Dounby School and about the stained glass window. The latter has had a particular interest for a couple from Anglesey, because one of the scenes it depicts is the Battle of Anglesey.

More and more people make comments like "Thank you for being open", "Thank you for letting us inside the church", or "thank you for sharing your church" and from speaking to some of them I know this is because, where they come from, it wouldn't be possible to leave a church open. This year their comments have extended to the churchyard, because many of them are, sadly, accustomed to seeing churchyards that have been vandalised. We can only hope that this "little gem", as it is called by one visitor, will remain "a haven" or "a place of pilgrimage" as others have called it, and that visitors will be able to continue to enjoy it.

**Bertie Harvey - Secretary,
St Magnus Church Birsay Trust**



Birsay Community Association

We are continuing to hold events to help increase our bank balance towards our goal of a new hall and will hopefully be able to report more on this project later on in the year.

We have a new user group in the hall now, they are the toddler group who meet every Tuesday morning from 10am - 12 noon.

Our car boot sales are held on the last Sunday of every month and we have our own sales table, baking stall and bottle stall and we would be most appreciative of any donations for these. So, if you are having a clear out please give us a call. Our last event was the Big Day Out and was another success. We were blessed with a sunny day, of which there have been few this year. I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the committee to thank the WRI and the Lifeboat ladies who gave their time to help with the catering duties, especially the waffle makers, and to Sarah Scarth for organising the children's sports.

Our next event after our Bingo in September is a Snail Race Night in October. We will have a bar and hot snacks available. It is a very enjoyable evening and we would encourage anyone who hasn't been before to come along for a great night's entertainment.

Lastly, we would like to hear from anyone who has any suggestions for events or themes they would like to see held in the hall that we could add to our fundraising calendar.

Contact Marty (President) 721400, Caroline (Secretary) 721452, Ann (Caretaker) 721301.

Caroline Atkinson, Secretary

Birsay Guild

Here is the Programme for the winter season:-

October 1 st .	Joint meeting with Sandwick and Harray Guilds in Quoyloo Church Hall for a Travel Talk by Mrs E. Bevan. 7.30pm
October 18 th	Winter Rally at East Church, Kirkwall at 2pm. Speaker from the Leprosy Mission.
November 8 th	Open Night and Sales Table at Twatt Church Hall at 7.30pm. Barbara Osbourne from Kinross will give an update on the work of the Children's Hospice Association, Scotland.
December 3 rd	Joint meeting with Harray and Sandwick Guilds in Harray Community Centre at 7.30pm. Entertainment by the Bea Choir.
January 10 th	Birsay Guild meet in Twatt Church Hall at 7.30pm. There will be a talk by Andy Alsop, "Working in the Antarctic."

February 14 th	"The Theme" with the committee and an update on the Project. Meeting at Twatt Church Hall at 7.30pm.
March 13 th	AGM at Twatt Church Hall at 7.30pm, followed by an evening with our minister, Rev. Andrea Price.
April 10 th	Twatt Church Hall at 7.30pm. Healing Rooms: The Life Centre with Gill and Andrew.
May 8 th	Twatt Church Hall at 7.30pm. "Stilling the Waves of the Mind" Eastern Mediation with Jenny Marriot.

New members and visitors warmly welcomed to any of our meetings.

Jan Crisp, Secretary - Birsay Guild.

From the heading, the following might not appear to be of interest to readers of Roond About Birsay but it is necessary to include the first part as it leads on to the strange noise heard in the Twatt Kirk.

Strange Noises at Stenness

(From the Orkney Herald of 12th July 1882)

About two weeks ago, the people of the houses of Hobbister and Turningstone in Stenness began to hear a noise proceeding from the earth. It resembled the chirping of a chicken and they, imagining it to be some kind of bird, took no notice of it. But the sound continued to be heard and almost immediately on the striking of the hour of 10pm it sent forth its weird note and continued at intervals till the small hours of the morning. A party was organised to see if they could discover its source. They returned defeated. Starting at the farmhouse of Hobbister, they heard it as if it were a few paces before them. They went for it but it always seemed to be at the same distance. On marshy and soft ground it seemed loudest. It was heard distinctly as far as the house of Turningstone and there it ceased but was quite distinct anywhere between the two houses but nowhere else in that district. About a week after, the same sound was heard at Walkerhouse in Evie but only for one night. Some boys from Firth went up to find it but returned in the nerves, and have not recovered their equilibrium yet. We understand a party is to go from Kirkwall some evening in the hope of making some discovery.

Another correspondent says "Noises are also heard in Birsay. For the past two or three weeks, when the congregation at Twatt Church, Birsay, have risen to sing, a prolonged whistling begins, only terminating with the finishing of the psalm. It has no regard to the stops or variations of the tunes and only begins and ends with the singing. All attempts of the congregation to discover its source are in vain.

In a further article in the Orkney Herald of 19th July 1882, it was stated that the noise in Stenness had been traced to a waterhen (coot). There was no mention as to what was causing the noise in the Twatt Church.

Submitted by Harold Esson.

Hundasaeter Weather Station.

The winter half year (Oct-Mar) proved to be the wettest on record since 1841. The previous wettest, similar period was in 1997. Another event worthy of note was the average temperature in April which was 3.7°C above the 50 year average - high pressure was a feature of April. In June the rainfall was only 16mm which was one of the lowest rainfalls for June since records began, temperatures were near the 50 year average and , unusually, the predominant wind direction was NNE.

Month	Max Temp('C)	Min Temp('C)	Rain - mm	Sun - hrs	Max wind(k)	Av wind(k)
Jan	10.5	-1.8	181.1	25.0	56.5	16.1
Feb	10.2	-3.2	111.1	47.1	44.3	13.1
Mar	11.2	-2.0	79.9	143.8	69.6	14.9
Apr	18.2	-1.3	57.0	167.7	37.4	11.8
May	16.0	-0.9	83.7	204.9	48.7	11.2
Jun	19.4	0.5	16.0	156.5	40.0	9.9

Supplied by Keith Johnson.

Editor's footnote

Well, that seems to be all I have for this issue. I had hoped to get an article from the School but unfortunately they haven't been able to get anything done in time for this edition but they will have something for next time. You will have noticed that we now have Marty Hay on our Community Council. He may well be a man to keep in with. I'm sure most of you heard him on Radio Orkney recently speaking about the poor weather we have had lately and how it was posing problems for him as a contractor and for the farmers. Have you noticed that it stopped raining the very next day and it hasn't been bad since? Most of the harvest has been gathered in, including our bere, (plenty of beremeal once more!). Thanks Marty, Speak up earlier next year!

Just to finish on a happy note, I will pass on a story of my younger, misspent days in Wyre. One fine summer evening, a few Wyre men (who shall remain anonymous) decided to go across to Rousay for a few pints, there being no pub in Wyre. Returning about breakfast time the next morning, they made their way home. One of them, attempting to get out of his boiler suit while being slightly unsteady on his legs, sat down rather heavily on the edge of the bed, awakening his wife. Thinking unbelievably fast, considering his condition, he pulled his half discarded clothes back up and said "Come on, lass, hid's a grand morning, time to get up" He got away with it, too!!

I hope you all have a good winter. I wish you all the best and I'll be trying to do another of these next Spring.

Johnny Johnston



Birsay Church Flower Club

It has been a busy summer for the flower arrangers. Several members went to Orphir to entertain their flower club in May. We journeyed to Deerness in July and were mightily impressed first by Hazel Foubister's well-established cottage garden, of many areas and a most successful vegetable plot. Then we called on Evelyn Irvine at Symbister and explored her well designed, colour-co-ordinated flower beds. A delicious supper at The Commodore rounded off a most enjoyable outing.

Monthly meetings have continued along the usual lines. In April we had "Child's Play" with Renee Isbister, and "Beauty in Simplicity" was the theme for the May workshop with Yvonne Paice.

At the Annual General Meeting in June, Renee Isbister was re-elected to the Chair and the only changes to the committee were Karen Johnston and Katrina Gray, who replaced Elizabeth Herdman and Marjorie Welsh. Donations were made as follows: £100 to the Church, £50 to Macmillan House and £100 to MS Hyperbaric Chamber. The workshop that evening was a free choice entitled "Summer Splendour".

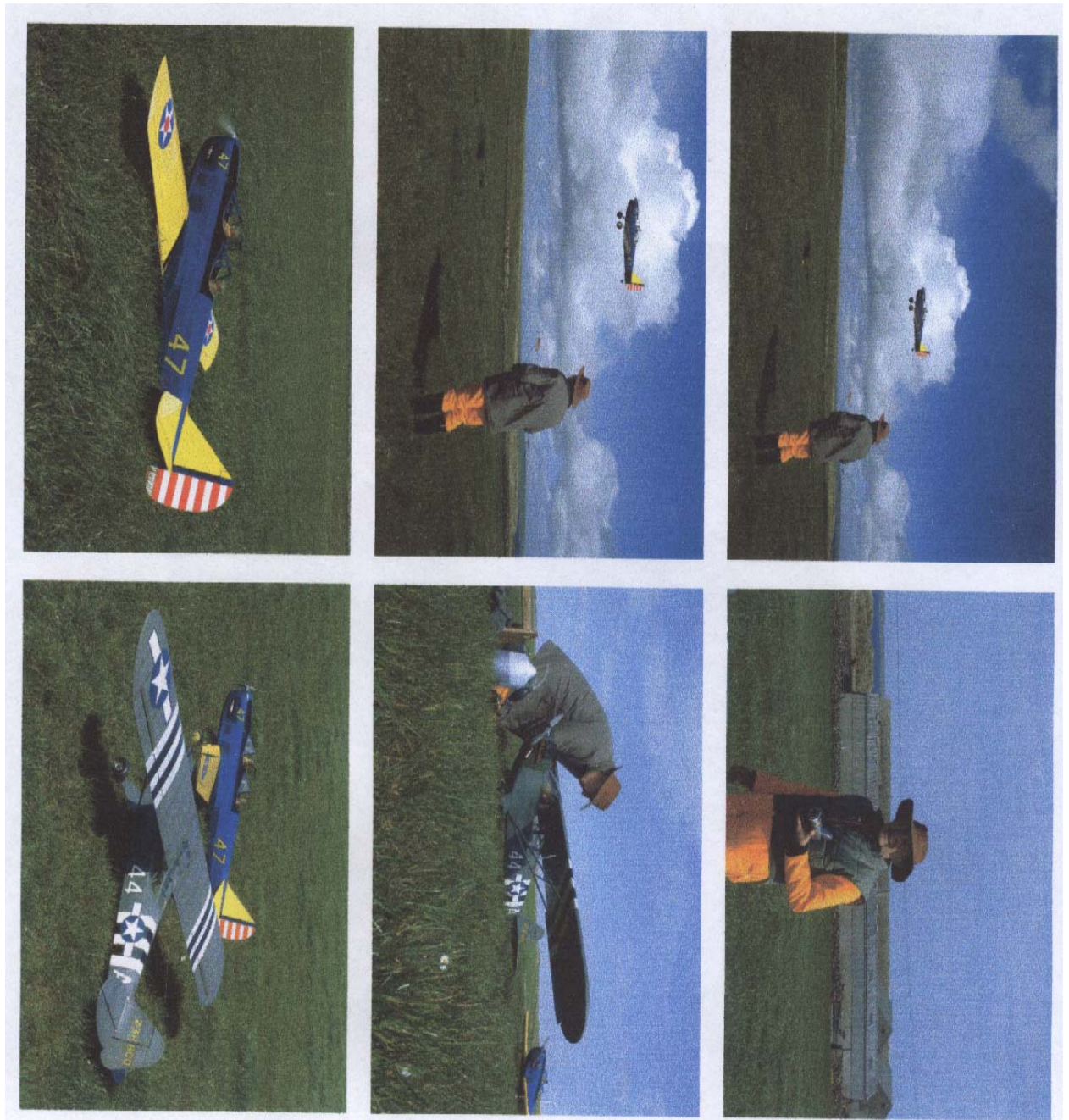
The new session got off to a great start with Yvonne Paice's interpretation of "Greensleeves" which incorporated green satin and sisal. Members were then much enthused creating their own interpretations.

"Back to Basics" with Bertha Mainland in September gave everyone a chance to explore some fundamental ideas such as balance, proportion, scale, rhythm, contrast, dominance and harmony, which can be applied to all designs.

We look forward to a visit from Christine Harcus in October when she will use "A Little of What you Fancy" to make the most of a limited number of flowers. This will be followed by an Open Night in November and initial thoughts are being considered on how to celebrate the Club's 25th Anniversary which falls on 21 June 2008.

Why not come along to the Open Night on 20 November. No obligation to join, but we are always happy to welcome new members.

Bertha M Mainland, Secretary.



These were the model planes brought up to Orkney and demonstrated by Ronald Bayne on the old Twatt drome earlier on this year. The Birsay Heritage Trust hope to repeat this sometime in the future since it was so popular this time.